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WALTER GIBBS, THE YOUNG BOSS.





WALTER GIBBS, THE YOUNG BOSS

AND OTHER STORIES

A BOOK FOR BOYS

BY
EDWARD WILLIAM THOMSON

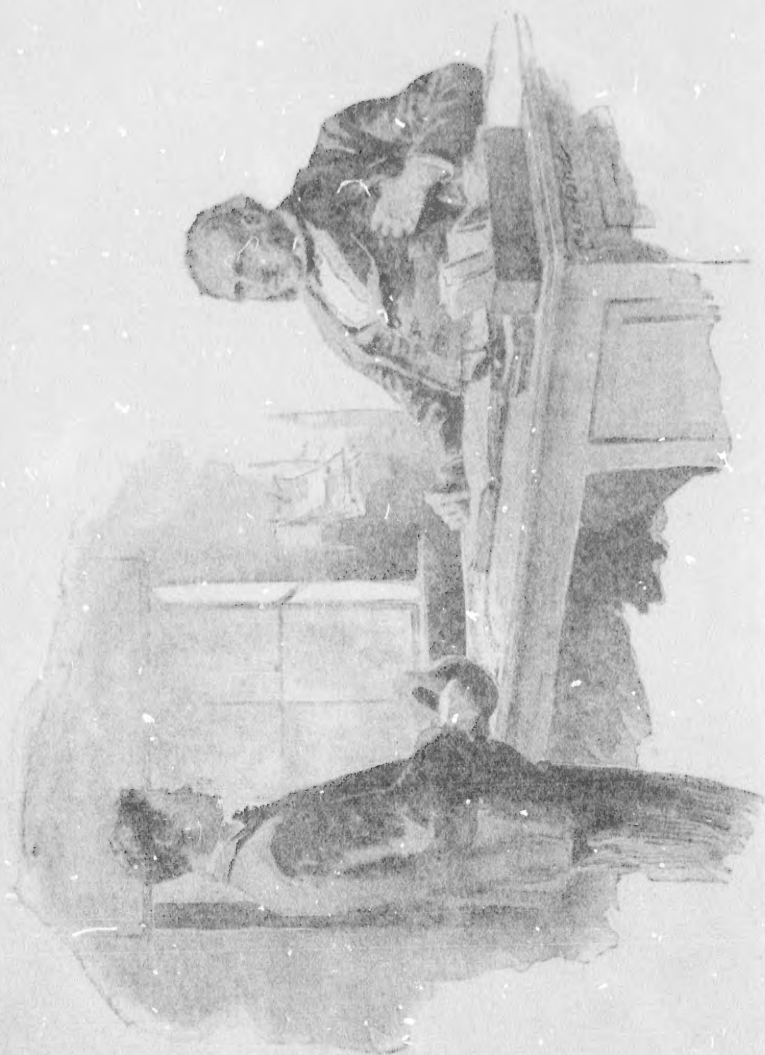
AUTHOR OF "THE RED SHIRT"

TORONTO:

WILLIAM BRIGGS, WESLEY BUILDINGS.

C. W. CLARK, Montreal, Que.

S. F. HUESTON, Halifax, N.S.



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THESE stories all first appeared in the *Youth's Companion*, Boston, to whose publishers the author is indebted for liberty to issue the tales in the present form.

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WALTER GIBBS, THE YOUNG BOSS.

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WALTER GIBBS, THE YOUNG BOSS.

CHAPTER I.

A BANKER AND A BOY.

MR. DOUGLAS GEMMILL, private banker in the small Canadian town of Garroch, stared in amazement at the sunburned youth who faced him across a low, table desk in the back office of the bank. It was after four o'clock of an afternoon in late September. Mr. Gemmill had finished his daily business with the public when Walter Gibbs had asked to be admitted on a matter of urgency.

"But, man alive," said Mr. Gemmill, who was a Scot by birth, "I never heard tell o' the like! You, a boy, come here and ask me for a credit of two thousand dollars! It's just amazing!"

"Well, sir," said Walter, "I expected it would surprise you. But I mustn't leave any-

thing untried. My mother authorized me to come. Mr. Barry, the lawyer, says she can act legally for my father while he's unconscious. You'd let my father have the money, wouldn't you, sir?"

"Aye, your father, lad. That's a horse of another color. But he's in brain fever, or the like — and there's no telling if —" The banker stopped short; he shrank from telling the boy his father might soon die.

"It's really my father you'd be lending to," said Walter, "and the contract is good. I went over the ground with my father, and I think he told me all he meant to do. It's a very simple job — draining that lake."

"Aye, is it? Perhaps you'll just explain it, Wally."

The youth took from his breast pocket a large note-book such as surveyors use, and pencilled a sketch while he talked: —

"Here's the lake — they call it Loon Lake. It's ten miles from Elbow Carry, and that's forty miles up the Ottawa from here. The lake is more than a mile long, half a mile wide, and about twelve feet deep. It is in the middle of

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a flat of ten or twelve thousand acres of rich land. That's the land that Mr. Hebden wants to drain."

"What for?"

"So that he can crop it. Nothing but wild hay grows there now. It is flooded in spring and early summer. He thinks he can plough and sow it, or sell it off in farm lots if it's made dry."

"Well, how is that to be done?"

"Easy enough, sir. This creek runs out of the lake to the Ottawa River, two miles away. There's a fall of twenty-five feet in the creek. Its bed is white limestone, easy to blast out. Above the fall there is scarcely any water in summer, for the lake sinks very low and stops discharging. My father's contract is to blast out a channel four feet deep from the fall to the lake."

"I see. That will lower the lake four feet, eh?"

"Yes, sir, from its summer level. But my father has the option of going deeper, and for that he would get nearly twice as much per cubic yard."

"Aye, we'll no mind that," said the banker,

cautiously pursing his lips. "It's best just to reason on the plain contract, and no chance work. How much excavation in the four-foot channel?"

"About six thousand yards, sir."

"What's the price per yard?"

When the banker, whose business was to know something about all sorts of business, heard the price, he whistled.

"Man, there should be profit in yon, lad!"

"Yes, sir, and there may be more if we go deeper. But I was going to explain that the rock is harder under the top layer of four feet — at least it is where it crops out at the fall."

"Ah, well, I've said we'll just not reckon on the deep work. You seem to know what you're talking about, Wally."

"It would be queer if I didn't, sir — I helped my father to figure on the whole thing. He talks to me a good deal while we're working."

"You're learning the surveying, eh?"

"Yes, sir, and civil engineering. I'm apprentice to my father."

"Aye, I've seen you with yon whig-maleerie — what-you-call-it?"

"Theodolite, I guess you mean, sir."

"Aye, theodolite! Just that. I don't remember your father taking a contract before."

"Not just around here, sir. But when he sees a good small one, he goes in for it sometimes. He's been building the Buckstone River bridge and dam."

"Aye, has he? And it's there he fell off the pier, eh, and got his hurt?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does Doctor Mostyn say of his case?"

"He says father will come round all right, but his head will be affected for a good many weeks, maybe. And he should go south soon — as soon as he's strong enough to be moved, for his lungs are delicate, and he'll be weak to face the winter."

Mr. Gemmill was a ruddy-faced, stout, combative-looking man of over fifty. He could frown very terrifically at delinquent borrowers, but he now beamed quite genially at Walter. The banker lay back in his chair and gazed steadily at the youth, who looked him straight in the eye with perfect ingenuousness.

"Your father put up fifteen hundred dollars' forfeit, eh?"

"Yes, sir; it's in the hands of Mr. Bemis, the manager of the Merchants' Bank branch at Elbow Carry."

"Tell me about that."

"Well, sir, Mr. Hebden is very hot to have the job of draining finished this fall. He insisted on my father starting with at least thirty men on the first of October—that's two days after to-morrow. And he insisted on my father putting up fifteen hundred, to be forfeited in case he doesn't get started on time. Besides that, the job must be finished by the first of next January, or else my father forfeits a hundred dollars a day till it's done."

"Hebden is cranky, it's well known. But I wonder at your father."

"My father had a purpose, sir. He considered it no risk to put up the forfeit. And by doing so he could better insist that Mr. Hebden should put up forfeit money, too. You know he hates to pay out his money. They say he makes all kinds of delays. But in this case he is bound to forfeit three thousand dollars if he fails to pay any monthly estimate three days after it is certified by Surveyor Leclerc."

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Mr. Gemmill laughed loudly.

"Good!" said he. "Your father was wide-awake this time. But of all the green gowks of English cockneys that ever came out to Canada, Hebden is the worst. Ah, weel, i.e. dealings with a daft body one must fall in with whimsies. But it's a pity, Wally,— your father mortgaged his house to raise yon fifteen hundred, and now the forfeit's gone."

"It will be if I can't save it. That's what I'm trying to do, Mr. Gemmill. I do hope you will allow me a credit!"

"For two thousand dollars! Good sakes, lad, what for do you want so much money?"

"I don't want it all now, sir. But I'll have to put at least thirty men on the job on the first of October. I'll want money to pay their wages the first month before I get an estimate from Mr. Hebden, and they're sure to be asking for advances, too."

"Say seven hundred dollars, Wally," Mr. Gemmill threw in.

"Then I've got to take them up to Elbow Carry by steamer; take them ten miles back in the woods or marshes: get a big shanty built;

feed all hands for a month; buy powder, fuse, charcoal — ”

“Charcoal? What for?”

“For the blacksmiths to sharpen drills with. There’s no other blacksmiths’ coal within fifty miles, and charcoal’s best, anyhow.”

“Go ahead, lad,” said the banker, looking pleased.

“I’ll need to buy steel and iron for jumpers, ball drills, and striking hammers; a blacksmith’s outfit, some axes, a cooking kit — ”

“Oh!” interrupted the banker, laughing, “I see you know what plant you’ll need. But why risk the money? Why not go to Hebden and get him to let your father out of the contract, seeing he’s been unexpectedly hurt?”

“I did go to see him, sir, and I’m almost ashamed to say it. But my mother thought I ought to. I came from there this morning. I told him all about my father’s being badly hurt. I asked him to extend the contract till next year. But nothing would do. He’s an ugly-tempered little man.”

“He said he would seize the fifteen hundred forfeit, eh?”

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"Yes, sir."

"Did you tell him that your father had no experienced friend or partner or employé to act for him?"

"No, sir. But I think I left him under the impression that we couldn't go on with the job. For I didn't then see how we could. It was only when I got home that I thought of coming to you. I wish you could think it right to help my mother and father in this trouble, sir."

"At what rate, Wally?"

"At any rate you like to ask, sir."

"Twenty per cent a month, Wally?"

"You wouldn't like to ask that, Mr. Gemmill," smiled the youth.

"No, eh?" Mr. Gemmill looked merry, and then grave. "Man alive, just consider! It's me that's to take the risk. Here's a lad of eighteen wants two thousand dollars. He can't give a penny of security. His father is down sick with his head caved in. Suppose he gets on his legs in two or three months, will he pay a debt like this, incurred without his authority? Besides, his house is already mortgaged. Don't you see, lad, that you're asking me to lend you

two thousand dollars, no less, on your personal word?"

Walter stood in deep thought for a full minute. There was depression in his voice when he next spoke, but he looked the banker in the eye with frank good nature.

"I see that, sir. I'm sure I'd pay you all right, but I can understand it wouldn't be business to deal so with a fellow of my age."

"Aye — you see that, eh?"

"Yes, sir, and I'll bid you good-day, and I'm obliged to you for listening so kindly to my story." Walter turned to go.

"Wait a wee, Wally. Never be precipitate, lad," said Mr. Gemmill with an oracular air. "Business is business — no doubt of that. But is it always just exactly good business to be so bound up in red tape that a man can't see the length of his nose? Tell me that, now?"

Walter sat down with joy thumping at his heart and beaming from his eyes on the banker.

"Lad, but I like you," said Mr. Gemmill, who was really an impulsive old gentleman.

"I like you, too, sir," said Walter quite simply, and the banker laughed outright at the reply.

"It's an unco' strange world we're living in," said Mr. Gemmill, "if a business man is to make no account of personal character and ability by way of security, but be all for endorsements and bonds and the like. In my opinion it's the wise lender that looks to the quality of his customer first, eh, Wally?"

But Walter said nothing. He had too much tact to speak as if taking to himself the implied praise, but he blushed under the sense of approval.

"Who's your foreman?" Mr. Gemmill said, suddenly recovering caution.

"My father hired Pat Lynch last week, before he was hurt."

"Aye—did he? Well, I'll no say but what Pat's a very honest man. And he can get work out of men, moreover. But your father would be reckoning to oversee Pat himself."

"Yes, sir, I know that. I'll have to be on the job all the time."

"You think you can boss it?"

"Yes, sir. I've seen a good deal of rock excavation."

"What about your men?"

"My father spoke to thirty. They were expecting to start to-morrow. A cook and blacksmith, too. The blacksmith is under pay already."

"You'll be ten miles from any village?"

"Yes, sir. Elbow Carry is the nearest place."

"And if your men struck work you'd be stuck?"

"Yes, sir; for there's none too much time to do the job in. But they're to engage by the month. When I knew any of them were going I could look out for more."

"That's right. Engage them all in writing, mind you."

"Yes, sir." Walter spoke with some excitement at the significance of the banker's advice.

"Well, Wally, I don't know but you can have the money. If you don't do well with it, I'm deceived. I'd believe you've got a grand notion of business, but for one thing."

"What's that, Mr. Gemmill?"

"You're not asking what I'll charge for the accommodation."

"I know you'll do what's right, sir."

"So I will, Wally, so I will," said the banker,

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warmly. "And that was good business sense in you, too. It's in knowing what-like man you're dealing with that the sense comes in. I'll charge you what I'd charge your father. And now, don't you feel the responsibility weighing heavy on you, lad?"

Walter thought a while before he replied. "Well, sir, I guess I feel more glad than anything."

"Go along, lad. You're all right. If you'd said you were burdened with a great sense of responsibility I'd have thought you were a wee bit hypocritical. You'll feel it on your young shoulders, though, before you get through this job. Here's my hand to you for a straightforward, honest lad, and no humbug about you. I'll see you a man when you come back to Garroch."

When Walter had gone the old gentleman sat twiddling his pen and looking out of the window absently, and smiling at the course he had taken, for his heart said it was creditable. But the questioning habit of his business gradually came back to his head. Why was it that He' len, the cranky Englishman, was giving so unusually high a price for that rock excavation?

Was there some risk in the job of which Walter did not know?

"Well, it's too late now," said Mr. Gemmill, going through the village streets to his tea. "My promise is given. And if there is some unseen difficulty before him, I'll just have to trust his young brains to get round it."

Meantime Walter had gone home on flying feet, though already his elation at securing the money was giving way to the sense of responsibility which he had disavowed.

So much to buy; so many men to hire and command; so urgent a need to save the forfeit by getting his men to work within three days! In the cares of the venture he almost forgot that steady, dull pain at his heart, which meant anxiety for the life of his father.

As the blue-eyed boy of business went up the front steps of his father's mortgaged home, a younger boy, keen-looking and brown-eyed, came down to meet him.

"Well, Sam, how's father now?" said Walter to his brother.

"Hsh! Walter," warned Sam. "He's in the delirium again."

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"Talking about the contract?"

"Yes; it's always the contract, and the mortgage, and the forfeit. Now he's got something new. He's talking about a dam a good deal."

"That'll be the dam at the Buckstone Bridge, of course. There's no data on the new contract. It's on the old contract the dam is."

"Well, then, he's got the two things mixed up in the delirium," said Sam. "I guess that's it. I suppose Mr. Gemmill won't let you have the money, eh?"

"But he's going to."

"Walter! Going to give you enough to go on with the job?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"Oh, bully! Hooray!"

"H—sh, Sam. Father may hear."

"Well, you are a buster, Walter! And you'll be boss! What job are you going to give me?"

"Job of going to school five days a week, Sam," smiled Walter.

"Oh, come now, Walter. You'll want a clerk and timekeeper."

"Guess not, Sam. I calculate to do all that

myself. But we'll see. Come, let us go up to mother with the news."

As they tiptoed up-stairs they could hear the voice of their father in his delirium:—

"Of course, Hebden," cried the injured engineer. "Forfeit—that's all right. But oh, the water! See it rising! See! I'm all right, though; but if the dam goes—that's the trouble. Time is the essence of the contract. Yes, yes, yes. I'll push it. Fifteen hundred dollars' forfeit—all gone, all gone! The dam, the dam, the dam!" he wailed, and stopped short, so that complete silence fell on the house. Then, after a considerable pause, his incoherent ravings began again.

Meantime Walter's mother had come forth into the upper hall to meet her boys.

"I wonder what dam it is that's troubling father's mind," said she.

"Oh, that's the dam he built above Buckstone Bridge, where he was hurt," said Walter, confidently. "It was a hard job. Father has got all his business all mixed up together, I think. Poor father! How long will he be this way, does the doctor say?"

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"Perhaps three or four days, Walter. The doctor says there's some pressure on his brain, but it will be all right soon. Only father must go south and mustn't be troubled by business at all for a long time. It will be pretty hard to keep it from him, though—he will be so anxious when he knows the forfeit money is lost."

"But it isn't, mother," said Sam.

"Oh Walter! Has Mr. Gemmill helped us?"

"Yes, mother. I'm to have two thousand dollars' credit, and I must get right to work this evening hiring men."

"God bless Mr. Gemmill forever!" said Mrs. Gibbs fervently. "He trusts my dear son. Oh Walter, if you can supply your father's place! Why, we shall be saved from ruin!"

"I'll do my best, mother. I believe I can run the job. Won't you tell Mary to give me my tea at once? I must start right out and hunt up Pat Lynch and the men."

CHAPTER II.

SAVING THE FORFEIT.

AT eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the first of October, Walter Gibbs, with thirty-five men, a blacksmith, and a cook, landed from the Ottawa River steamer *Prince George* at the lumbermen's village of Elbow Carry. There bad news confronted him in the person of James Jaffray, the landlord of the "Royal Arms," a large, white, frame hotel that faced the wharf from across a wide space of rock and sand. Behind this hotel the village rambled up the side of a considerable hill.

Jaffray, better known as "Windy Jim" to the lumbermen of the Ottawa Valley, was a tall, spare, exceedingly active man of nearly sixty, who had gained a considerable fortune, mainly from teaming. When gangs of raftsmen had run cribs down the long, crooked, furious Elbow Rapids, Jaffray's spring wagons took them

quickly over the Carry, seven miles of good road, to the Head, that they might run another lot of cribs the same day.

He was the victim of some nervous disease of the eyelids which caused him to wink incessantly with both eyes while speaking. This gave him a most undignified and comical appearance, quite inconsistent with his shrewd, forcible character.

It was seldom suspected that Jaffray lived in much mortification because the ludicrous winking still made him a laughing-stock after he had become so wealthy and important that his soul longed for the title of "Squire," commonly bestowed on a rival tavern-keeper of trifling consequence, but come of a "good family." None but a few thirsty bummers about the bar called Jaffray "Squire." To nearly all other men he was known by his youthful nickname of Windy Jim.

In business a man never can tell precisely what he gains by good manners and loses by bad. Walter, during his two previous visits to Elbow Carry, had invariably spoken to his host as Mr. Jaffray. Moreover, a sentiment of pity

for the gray, shrewd man, so unfortunately compelled to look always ludicrous, had moved the youth to address him with particular politeness. Thus he had unwittingly gained a valuable friend.

But it was with no cheering visage that Jaffray confronted Walter as he stepped from the gangway to the wharf.

"Well, you're here at last!" said the tavern-keeper.

"Yes, sir. I telegraphed you it was impossible for me to get away yesterday, as I had hoped. Have you got five teams ready for me?"

"Five? Fifty, if you want 'em! But I guess you don't."

"No, five will do, Mr. Jaffray," said Walter.

"I don't believe you'll need any," retorted Jaffray, ominously.

"How's that, sir?"

"Hebden says your father has thrown up the contract. Says he'd ought to have had thirty men on the job yesterday. He's gone down there himself with a gang—started at daylight."

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"He has, has he?" said Walter, reticent, though surprised.

"Says your father's forfeited fifteen hundred and the job."

"Oh, I guess not," said Walter, coolly, concealing his dismay. "How does he make that out?"

"Well, this is the first of October. You'd ought to have started yesterday."

"The contract calls for a start on or before the first."

"It's nearly noon. You can't get started at work ten miles from here to-day, can you?"

"Can't I? I leave that to you, Mr. Jaffray."

"You will, eh? Level head, my son."

The tavern-keeper loved to have things left to his management. He was instantly in action.

He had a score to settle with Mr. Hebden, for the small Englishman had struck a blow at Jaffray's interests by employing the rival tavern-keeper's teams.

Mr. Hebden had inherited a lumbering business from his uncle, who had built it up from headquarters at Elbow Carry. To this the new owner had recently come from his office as a

small solicitor in England. Such was the man's self-confidence that he imagined himself competent to manage the very large and complicated "concern," though he "could not tell a cant-hook from a broadaxe," so his foreman said.

"Bill," shouted Jaffray, to one of his hostlers, "get seven teams in right away! Have 'em round in a jiffy. John, run and tell my girls to hustle up grub for forty men — ham 'n' eggs, fried pork, cold beef, tea, anything that's handy — biff, mind! Mr. Gibbs, let your men hurry your truck ashore. Make 'em work like sixty. Then let 'em come straight to the house for grub. You haven't got a minute to spare, but eat men must."

The men, who were nearly all Irishmen, had already jumped to obey Jaffray. They were delighted with the prospect of a dinner at the hotel table, quite famous on the river, for they had expected to boil tea on a fire in the open, and feed on cold pork and bread. Moreover, they had heard enough to suspect that their job was threatened, and a fight for possession of the ground likely to occur that afternoon.

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"Come with me, Mr. Gibbs," said Jaffray, taking Walter's arm and walking rapidly toward his hotel. "You understand there's no time to lose. That's why I took the liberty of ordering dinner for your whole gang—not but what it will pay me, too. And seven teams will hustle us down there faster than five. I'll show Hebden who he calls Windy Jim!" and his eyes winked with extraordinary quickness.

"Why did Mr. Hebden take a gang of men down there? That beats me to understand," said Walter.

"Why, don't you see? He's bound to claim that forfeit. He's not going to give you possession. I'm told he is barricading the road, in case you should come to-day. He won't say it's a barricade, but that's what it will amount to. He'll make out he didn't expect you, and that he's going to work there with a gang of his own, and he'll try to keep you from striking a stroke to-day. To-morrow he'll claim the forfeit. Say, where *is* that money?"

"It's in Mr. Bemis's hands, Merchants' Bank branch up the hill."

"Well, you run right along up there now, my son, and tell Bemis you've got men here — tell him you'll get to work to-day. Be sure you notify him in writing. Hurry, or he may go out to dinner, and he's got no clerk. You can't afford to wait till he comes back; we must be out of here in half an hour. I'll show Hebden who's who at Elbow Carry!"

"All right. But I say, Mr. Jaffray, please tell my foreman that we'll not bother taking the blacksmith's kit along to-day, nor any of the rest of the heavy truck. It'll be enough if we just take drills for all hands, and the big tent and a day's provisions. You can send the rest down to-morrow."

"You bet I can! And you've got a head on you, my son. Leave me to fix things. You scoot for Bemis. Now, don't forget. Notify him in writing, mind."

So Walter ran up the hill just in time to find the bank agent locking his door and about to leave for the dinner-hour.

"Mr. Bemis, I believe," said Walter.

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"Can't you come in after dinner?"

"No, sir, I am hurried for time."

"Well come in," and Mr. Bemis opened his door.

"Garroch local bank, eh?" he said, on taking and examining the check which Walter tendered. "Mr. Gemmill's check's all right, I suppose. But how is this? It's not drawn to you."

"Yes, it is, sir. My name is Walter Gibbs."

"Pooh! I know Mr. Walter Gibbs, of Garroch, well. He's old enough to be your father."

"He is my father."

"Oh, I see! You're his son, then?"

"That's it, sir. I've come up to start work at Loon Lake."

"Aren't you a day late?"

"The first of October's not gone, sir."

"Precisely what I told Mr. Hebden last night."

"Did he claim the forfeit?"

"He did. But I told him you might come along to-day."

"What did he say to that?"

"Well, I don't know but what he was right. You can't get started to-day on the job."

"But I shall."

"How, if you find a lot of trees sort of accidentally felled across the road?"

"Surely Mr. Hebden wouldn't do that!"

"I didn't say he would. But don't you go making any calculations on Mr. Hebden; he's a man by himself."

"Did he say he'd refuse me possession?"

"I've said too much already. Anyhow, it's none of my affair. Only if he claims forfeit to-morrow and you're not started, what can I do?"

"You'd hand him the money?"

"Shouldn't I have to? The bond is clear."

"All right. Will you kindly let me have pen and paper, Mr. Bemis?"

"Certainly, certainly."

Walter went over to the counter and wrote rapidly:—

1st October, 1893.

JOHN BEMIS, ESQ.,
Agent Merchants' Branch Bank,
Elbow Carry.

DEAR SIR,—I hereby give you notice that I will this day begin work with thirty-seven men on my father's account on the Loon Lake drainage contract. And I

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notify you to hold the forfeit moneys deposited with you in connection with the contract between my father, Walter Gibbs, and Howard Hebden, Esquire, and to disregard any claim from Mr. Hebden that the contract has not been begun according to agreement.

Yours truly,

WALTER GIBBS, JR.

"Good enough!" said Mr. Bemis, reading the paper. "I dare say you'll be sharp enough for Hebden. Down him if you can; nobody will be sorry." It was wonderful how quickly the little Englishman had arrayed against him all the "Colonials," as he contemptuously called them, of the lumbering country.

Walter's men were already feeding hugely when he returned to the hotel. The wagons were waiting for them outside. Fifteen minutes later Jaffray, with Walter on one side of him and Pat Lynch on the other, was lashing his horses up-hill at the head of the wagon procession.

"The b'ys is well plazed this day, Mither Walther," said Pat. "Troth and a bit of a ruction would be their delight entirely."

"Oh, pshaw, Pat, there won't be any trouble."

"Throuble! Not the laste in the wurld. Misther Hebden has only ten pay-soups wid him. Throuble, is it? Us agin ten Frinch!"

"But it would never do to fight them, Pat."

"Bedad, I don't know thin. It's paycible men we are. A child might play wid us afther the feed Squire Jaffray give us. But it would play puck wid us if we was kep' out of the job, and us engaged for the fall. Who'd pay us thin, I'd like to know?"

"We'll claim possession, and get it, too, Pat. But surely you're too intelligent to want to start the job with a fight."

"Faix, an' that's thrue," said Pat, plainly flattered. "But if they do be blockin' the road wid trees?"

"How did you hear anything about that?"

"Wid my two ears, Misther Walther. Wan of the min on the wharf tould me."

"Hebden is such a blab," interposed Jaffray, "that he brags of everything he's going to do. But I'll fix him and his barricade."

"Phwat way, squire?" Pat's Irish wits had instantly marked the blandness of Jaffray when the title was given him by the men in his bar.

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"Begor! That's the schame!" said Pat, really puzzled. "Oh, by this an' by that, if I'd a head on me like yourself, sor!"

"Here's my idea," said Jaffray, turning his face to Walter. "There are two roads around the marsh. Both lead to the place where your work lies. One is ten miles long; it crosses the south side of the hay-lands when they're dry, as now. The other is twelve miles; and it keeps high land to the north of the meadows. Hebd-den reckons you'll come by the short road; the other is not used at this season."

"Oh, I see. You'll take the long road," said Walter.

"Precisely. We'll get to the creek about a quarter of a mile behind him. Bill Hodgins came up from that way about ten o'clock. He said Hebd-den's men were felling trees across the short road, in a pinery, just a little on from where the road leaves the hay-land. They say the trees are for a new shanty. And that's where you've got to build your shanty if you want it handy to the job."

"I see. We'll circumvent him and get to

work right away," said Walter. "I'm ever so much obliged to you, Mr. Jaffray, for planning this."

"Hold on! We haven't got there yet," said Jaffray. "There's a danger. He may see us across the marsh on the bare highlands. Somebody has got to get him back into the pinery. If he sees us coming he may smell a rat and scoot across with his men and barricade the long road."

"And delay us till dark, eh?"

"Precisely. Then I don't know but your goose would be cooked."

"I'd claim possession," said Walter. "He couldn't refuse it according to the agreement."

"Oh, but you want to avoid law-play. He's one of these kind of one-horse lawyers — delay and a suit would just please him. You don't know the kind of a crank he is. You want to get *into* possession and at work to-day — then you've got him tight, I guess."

"I'll follow your advice, Mr. Jaffray."

"And well you might, Misther Walter. Be jabbers! The squire's got a head on his shoulders," put in Pat.



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"Well, maybe you'll have a row with Hebden and his men, Mr. Gibbs," said Jaffray, looking much gratified. "But this is what I advise: When the road forks, about four miles from here, you go ahead in this wagon with two or three men by the short road. Lynch and I and the others will go around the other way. You hold Hebden in parley — get him back into the woods to talk and keep him there till you hear the drills. Lord! I'd like to see the little runt's face when he hears the drills clanking!"

"It's a fair deception," said Walter. "He'll think I've failed to bring on a gang and he'll be ready to talk."

"Talk! Blather, you mean. Let him blather away all he likes. His gab will just suit you."

About an hour and a half later Walter, with three men, trotted from the hay-land into a pine wood and saw before them an accidental-looking barricade of many felled trees. Behind the nearest stood a red-faced, insolent-looking little man clad in loud plaid, knickerbockers, a deer-stalker cap, and a single eyeglass.

"Hi, there!" he cried. "Don't you know this isn't a public road?"

"How are you, Mr. Hebden?" cried Walter, standing up in the wagon.

"Aw — it's Mr. Gibbs's boy!" said Hebden, affecting surprise. "Glad to see you," as he really was, because Walter had so few men.

"I've come down to take possession according to the contract," said Walter. "Who's been blocking the road?"

"Dear me! Why, my boy, you're too late. I've put men on the job myself. These trees are for a shanty they're going to build."

"How am I too late? This is the first of October."

"But the contract calls for you to be at work to-day with at least thirty men."

"Well, I brought them up to Elbow Carry."

"Oh, but that won't do, my boy. Pooh! They should have been at *work* to-day. You've forfeited the job."

"Do you mean to say you'd claim fifteen hundred dollars from my father in this way — knowing him to have been so badly hurt — if I was only one day late in starting?"

"Of course — dear me — certainly! A contract is a contract. Law is law. Business

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"Well, I think it's a pretty tough business," said Walter. "Surely you don't mean to be so hard, Mr. Hebden. I'd like to talk it over with you."

"Oh, certainly! Talk as much as you like. Come along; I've a tent back in the trees. We'll be quite comfortable there. Come along."

So Walter left his men with the horses, crawled through and under the felled pines, and joined the little Englishman. Hebden was so delighted with his certitude of gaining the fifteen hundred dollars' forfeit, and with the opportunity to show his legal wisdom before an audience, that he called his ten Frenchmen off work to astonish them with his discourse.

Half an hour went by and still the little man was explaining the sacred nature of a contract. The law of contracts was the basis of modern civilization. It was a solemn duty to insist on the most exact fulfilment of written bargains. He talked so continuously that he caught no slightest sound of the wagons that Walter vaguely heard coming down the rocky hills.

"And so you really will take my father's fifteen hundred dollars?" said Walter, toward the last.

"It's my duty, my boy. A man's first duty is to himself. I'll draw the money to-morrow."

"I don't believe it, sir," said Walter, who had caught a faint rumble of wheels on the plank bridge over the creek.

"Oh, my good fellow, you're queer. Why shouldn't I draw it?"

"Well, for one thing, I've notified Mr. Bemis to hold it," said Walter, now unable to restrain his amusement.

"On what ground, my young friend?"

"On the ground that I'd start to-day."

"Oh, but you see you can't now. If you had thirty men; if they worked ten minutes to-day, your case would be good. But as it is — why, you haven't a leg to stand on in law. Hello! What's that noise?"

"It's my men at work," said Walter, coolly; for a great clanking of steel on rock suddenly echoed and rang through the woods.

"Your men?" shouted Hebden, springing wildly to his feet.

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"Yes; I sent them around with Jaffray's teams by the long road."

Instantly the choleric Englishman jumped at Walter so furiously that the boy's quickness of foot barely saved him from a heavy blow. Next moment he warded off another, and struck back. But Hebden had already reflected that he was committing assault before witnesses.

"Follow me, men!" he roared to his French-Canadians, and ran through the woods to the creek.

"Stop there! Come out of that!" he yelled, shaking his fist at Pat and his thirty, while Jaffray and his drivers grinned from the wagons back of the bridge.

"Troth, sor," said Pat, scratching his head and affecting to be puzzled, "how cud us shtop here and come out, too? Min can't be in two places at wanst."

"Shut up, you Irish hog! Come out of that! I'll prosecute every man of you for trespass."

"Hog, is it? Phwat's the name of the baste that 'ud thry for to bate a sick man out of his money?"

"Keep quiet, Pat," cried Walter.

"Oh! Whin a *gintleman* axes me!" grinned Pat. "Keep them dhrills going, bhys."

"I'll turn you out to-morrow! I'll pay no estimates! I'll bring an action for ejectment as sure as my name is Hebden!"

"It's circumvented your name is," laughed Pat. "Ax the squire. Oh, begorra, 'tis himself as is the sthrategist of sthrategists!"

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CHAPTER III.

HEBDEN'S FIRST BLOW.

WHEN Mr. Hebden, vowing to be even with Walter, had retreated before the sarcasms of Pat Lynch, Jaffray came down from his high wagon, winking both eyes furiously, and drew the young boss beyond hearing of his men.

"What are you going to do next?" he asked.

"Make camp first," replied Walter, promptly.

"That's right; always have in mind just what you're going to do next. Look ahead. You're not likely to have plain sailing on this job. Hebden will do all he can to worry you. Now what I want you to understand is this: when you're in a fix come to me. I wasn't born yesterday. Just you come to me in trouble."

"I will, Mr. Jaffray. It's very kind of you to make the offer. I certainly will. You saved the job to-day."

"All right. Of course I'll make a profit out of you sometimes — always when I do any real work, teaming or such. But advice — that's free, mind. I ain't going to let Hebden squeeze you out for want of advice, and you'll find I'm up to snuff.

"One difference between young fellows," continued Jaffray, impressively, "is that some have sense to take the advice of experience, and some have only sense enough to learn from experience after they've bought it by big mistakes. Now you can't afford to make any big mistakes on this job, so you come to me — *I'm Experience.*"

"All right, sir. And thank you kindly, Mr. Jaffray."

"Well, good-bye. I've got to get back to the Carry, and you've got to get into camp. Make your men comfortable, that's the first point. They ain't river-men; they're navvies. They can't rough it: they don't know how, and they won't learn, either. It's well you had sense to fetch the big tent right along. Up with it. Get plenty of hay in for the men to sleep on."

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"I don't know about that, Mr. Jaffray. That hay is Mr. Hebden's, of course. What would he do if I took it?" and Walter pointed to many large stacks of hay elevated on platforms in the marsh lane which could be seen up the creek.

"See, now, what it is to consult Experience," said Jaffray, impressively. "That isn't Hebden's hay. That's my hay — at least, all within a mile is. I bought it of Hebden. Take all you want of it, and good luck to you. Moreover, that hay will be of big importance to you yet, or I don't know beans. But there's no time to talk of that now; I'll tell you all about it another time. Good-bye."

Before the wagons had rumbled beyond hearing Walter, who was an experienced camper, had called the men from their drills. He showed some how to put up the big tent; he sent ten men into the marsh land for bundles of hay, which they carried compressed in ropes twisted of hay; he put Meigs, the blacksmith, and Duffy, the cook, at the work of preparing the evening meal. So that night the men slept in comfort, and the merry clanking of their

drills frightened the wild ducks of Loon Lake bright and early the next morning.

Now there was a shanty to build. Instead of putting his navvies at work so unusual to them, Walter consulted Experience in the person of Jaffray, who came down that day with the wagon-loads of supplies that had been left in his care.

"The point is this, Mr. Jaffray," said the young boss, as the navvies had already dubbed Walter. "If I take any of the men off the rock-work, Hebden may claim that I haven't got thirty men on the job, as the contract requires."

"I guess he wouldn't make much out of that claim," said Jaffray, "for the job means anything connected with the job, I calculate. But it's as well to run no risks of giving any kind of an excuse to that little shyster. Besides, a dozen river-men will build more shanty in two days than thirty laborers could in a week. I'll see and send you down a gang right away. Of course I'll charge you for the trouble."

"Certainly, sir, that's business; but I'll be obliged to you all the same."

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"You'll want about a forty-man shanty, I guess."

"About that, sir."

But before the gang of clever axemen had put the roof on, a great change came into Walter's plans. He determined to have an addition big enough for seventy men. His reasons for making so important an extension were frankly set forth in a letter to Mr. Gemmill, his backer and banker.

"It is this way," his letter ran. "Pat Lynch says there will be no trouble in taking out eight feet of the rock instead of four. He finds that the two upper layers are each two feet deep. My father thought that the layer under them was much harder, and as much as six feet deep. So it is at the outcrop at the fall.

"But there's a 'fault' a little way above it. And up stream from the fault the three layers are easy, and they lie as flat as a pancake, altogether, eight feet deep. So we ought to take them out, because we'll get twice as much for the lower four feet as for the upper.

"The drilling for eight feet won't be near double that for four feet, but there'll be twice

as much broken stuff to move out of the channel, and that's why I want to double my force."

Mr. Gemmill's only reply to this was a telegram, which Jaffray himself brought down from the Carry. It read:—

"I approve of the increase of your force.

"DOUGLAS GEMMILL"

Then Walter thought it would be good policy to take Jaffray fully into confidence. So he handed the despatch to the shrewd tavern-keeper and explained the circumstances. To the amazement of the young boss, Jaffray's two-eyed winking stopped, for the reason that he could not open either eye for mirth. His face expressed the extreme of almost wicked satisfaction, as he slapped his thin legs and curled up in paroxysms of glee.

"Son," he said, at last, "you've got a great head! This will be one on Hebden. To think you'll go eight feet deep! Why, he'll pay three times over, and he don't want this here channel no more'n a dog wants a tin tail."

"I don't think I quite understand, sir," said Walter, much puzzled.

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"'Tisn't necessary you should — not now," said Jaffray. "But I do. See that hay yonder?"

"Yes, sir."

"Know what it's worth a ton?"

"About twelve dollars."

"Yes, son, and more sometimes. Hay is hay in a rock country. Now you just think of that. But don't you say a word to anybody, not a word. I'll tend to all this at the right time. You drive the job."

Nothing more could Walter get from Jaffray on the mysterious subject. The young boss puzzled over it for two or three days, but his acquaintance with the lumbering industry and general business was too limited to give him the clue. Soon the matter went almost wholly out of his mind, as the responsibilities of the work crowded even more heavily on his young shoulders.

During the two weeks which went by between the starting of the work and the completion of the seventy-man shanty, Walter had learned that the direction of even a small work and a small number of men requires a sort of

ability which is quite different from knowledge and experience in actually performing the labor. Pat Lynch was a skilled foreman; his gang were all practised quarrymen. They blasted and wheeled out the rock at fine speed; but the task of keeping them able and willing put the young boss incessantly to the use of his wits.

He had to keep their time. He had to give them advances and keep account of the moneys. He had to send small checks on Mr. Gemmill to their wives at Garroch. He had to keep for them a store of small articles of clothing, tobacco, jack-knives, and many other odds and ends. He had to furnish Meigs, the blacksmith, with various things needed for the forge.

Above all he had to arrange for incessant supplies to the cook. In short, the young boss found himself an administrator, a sort of temporary father or Providence to each and all of the men, who must be kept comfortable and contented, else they would forsake the contract.

His duties as commissariat officer alone were a considerable task. The village of Elbow Carry was ten miles away, and its stores were

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ill supplied. There were few farmers, and no market-gardeners nor butchers in that region on the verge of the great lumbering country; but the men must have fresh meat, butter, eggs, potatoes, onions, cabbage, turnips, and at least milk enough to color their tea and coffee.

None of these things could be surely obtained at the Carry, and Walter, after buying a buck-board and horse from Jaffray, had to scour the country far and wide to obtain such supplies.

For the fact that his success depended on making his men comfortable became quickly fixed in his mind. He must be buyer and deliverer, for the few and scattered farmers could not be induced to bring their things to the camp. Indeed, they seemed to think they favored him in killing a sheep or cow for his money.

Late into the night the youth worked at his accounts, his time-book, his cash-book, his plans for next day. Sometimes he fell asleep while driving to and fro.

This mortified and alarmed him. He saw he must have an assistant. But who? Sam, of course. So he brought up his younger brother

from Garroch, and brought him just in time, for two days later the first blow of Hebdon fell heavily.

It was four days after the men had moved into the new shanty. Their satisfaction in its shelter had begun to make Walter feel that things were going very well. Mists that might be malarial had covered the lowlands above the tent every morning and evening; the fog had seemed to penetrate or leak into the canvas, and much the navvies had grumbled of discomfort and "sick-like" feelings, not wholly imaginary. Now, with a cheerful open fire in the middle of the roofed shanty, they seemed merry and content.

"Boss," said Meigs, the blacksmith, to Walter, "I'm pretty nigh out of charcoal."

"All right, Meigs. I'll see and get a load down from the Carry to-day."

"Oh, to-morrow will do."

"All right, Meigs."

Charcoal was, in a sense, the life of the work. It was necessary to Meigs' sharpening of the jumpers and drills, without which all hands must soon be idle. Now the contract required

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the work to go on continuously, except in bad weather, else daily forfeits would be incurred.

Walter had brought a small supply of charcoal from Garroch. He would earlier have ordered more from there had he not found that the wharfinger at Elbow Carry kept a supply on hand. For this the few blacksmiths of the forest region came many miles, and to this source Walter looked confidently. So he drove in at once to order a load in by one of Jaffray's wagons.

"Charcoal?" said the wharfinger. "I haven't got a bushel."

"Why, what's that?" said Walter, staring at the fresh supply in store.

"That's Mr. Hebden's. He bought the whole lot yesterday."

"Well, I dare say he'll sell me a load," for Walter had seen no more of the little Englishman, and could not credit anybody with persistent animosity.

"I guess he won't," said the wharfinger.

"Why, what's he need it all for?"

"I don't know — maybe he heard you were near out. It's true he needs some for his depot 'way back."

"I'll see him, anyhow," said the young boss, and walked toward the office of the Hebden estate. But on second thought he turned back for a moment.

"I want you to get in a couple of hundred bushels of charcoal for me right away," he said to the wharfinger.

"All right. It'll be here in a week." So Walter had settled promptly for at least a future supply.

On he went to Hebden's office.

"I'm told you've bought all the charcoal in town, sir," said Walter, smiling pleasantly, "and as I'm wanting some, perhaps you'll kindly sell me a load or two."

"Perhaps," snapped Mr. Hebden.

"I must have charcoal, you know, sir."

"That's what I thought."

"What? Did you buy it to cut me out?"

"Put it any way you please. It's mine, and I'll keep it."

Walter checked his anger, turned on his heel, and walked over to Jaffray's hotel in real dismay. He could think of no other store of charcoal within twenty-five miles, and there was no

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mineral coal nearer than Garroch. At this dire point the counsel of Personified Experience might be valuable.

But Jaffray was not in Elbow Carry. He had gone to Pembroke, seventy miles away, and would be absent for three days more. By that time, unless Meigs should be supplied with charcoal, all the men on Walter's job would be idle under pay, for they were hired by the month.

Hiring a spring box-wagon with a speedy team from Jaffray's stables, Walter appeared at the shanty with an undisturbed countenance at two o'clock that afternoon. His one chance was that the wharfinger at Black's Landing, twenty-five miles distant, might have a stock of the necessary charcoal. Thither he meant to drive at once; but he found at the shanty that "troubles never come singly."

As he drove through the small pinery and to the shanty door he heard the clink of drills and jumpers sounding merrily, together with the lighter tinkle of Meigs' hammer on anvil and on tools. Walter was resolved to keep those sounds going the next day at the price of driv-

ing during most of the coming night. But navies without cooked food will not work, and Sam, on hearing Walter's wagon, came out of the shanty with quite appalling news.

"Duffy's sick!" he said. "He was taken with some kind of queer pains after you went away. Nothing would do him but his bunk. So there he is, and I guess he's in for a bad illness."

"Great Cæsar!" said Walter. "Who cooked the dinner?"

"I did," said Sam, "in a kind of way. There's not another man on the gang that can cook at all."

"Bully for you, Sam!" said Walter, heartily. "I don't know what I'd do without you. Do you suppose you can cook a couple of meals more?"

"I s'pose I could. I can stand it if the men can."

"Did they grumble?"

"No — they said I did first-rate. But I know they will grumble. Why, I can't make bread, and what I don't know about soup and baked beans would make a book."

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"Look here, Sam, you must try to feed them till I get back in the morning. I've got to go to Black's Landing for charcoal. Don't say a word about it. Is Duffy in pain?"

"Yes, he is. We've got to fetch in a doctor."

"Jiminy, Sam! But that's so. Now I'll tell you. I must go to Black's and that means I can't let you have my horse. After you get supper you scoot over to Hodgins' farm — it's only four miles — and get him to drive you up to the Carry. Fetch down bread for a couple of days. Try to fetch back a cook. If you can't, you ask Mrs. Jaffray to let you have all the cakes and pies she can. They'll keep the men contented till to-morrow with your cooking, then I'll be back and straighten things out."

"And the doctor?" said Sam.

"Fetch the doctor for Duffy, of course. That's humanity, and it will please the men, too."

"All right, boss," said Sam, "you can depend on me."

While travelling over the long, bad road to Black's Landing Walter reflected with something like fear upon the degree to which the

work was dependent on the cook. From that he pursued a train of thought which convinced him that the blacksmith was still more essential to his success in fulfilling the contract. Cooks might be found without great difficulty in the lumbering country, but blacksmiths were few and far between. What if Meigs should fall sick, or suddenly leave at the end of the month? Sam could take the cook's place for a day or two, but who could take Meigs'?

He had new alarm in thinking of what might occur if either of these necessary functionaries should fall sick and strike during his own absence. Walter must go to Garroch for a few days to hire thirty or forty more navvies, and the cares of office were heavy on him as he reflected on the possibilities which his absence might leave Sam to encounter alone.

His immediate anxieties fell from him, however, when he reached Black's Landing after dark, and found that the wharfinger had charcoal in stock. Giving his horses and himself rest till two o'clock in the morning he took the road back with a full wagon, and reached the shanty just as the men were going to work.

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"Bedad, and I was thinkin' the job 'ud shtop to-day," said Pat Lynch, looking at the charcoal and the blackened young boss. "But it's yourself is the manager! Faix, Meigs was consatin' himself on a holiday. But now we're all right again. And I'm thinkin' ye'd betther hurry up thim other thirty or forty min if ye want us to get the eight-foot channel done this sayson."

"How's Duffy?" asked Walter. "If he's well enough to work I'll start for Garroch this afternoon."

"Well? Bedad, it's worse he is. But he can thravel to his wife. You'll need to take him wid you — and the doether says he'll be no use here for two weeks. Master Sam does well, though — for a bhy!"

"Then I must get a cook to-day," and the tired young boss was on his way to Elbow Carry in an hour.

There he found no Jaffray. To and fro he hurried through the village seeking a cook, but none was to be hired. Already the lumbermen were forwarding gangs and cooks to the far-away shanties for winter's work. Wholly beaten, Walter returned to the shanty at night,

resolving to start for Garroch early next morning, leaving Sam to cook for two days more. From Garroch he would send another cook immediately after arriving there.

But a great piece of luck seemed to have befallen him. On entering the shanty while Sam was serving supper, Walter saw a singular-looking, almost humpbacked little man assisting to pass the dishes.

"Here's a cook for you, Walt," said Sam.

"You?" cried Walter, gazing with delight on the stranger.

"Yes, sir, I'm lookin' for a jawb. I'm a pystry byker by tryde. My name is Jorrocks, Bob Jorrocks."

"You're a Londoner, I see, Jorrocks. Did you ever cook in a shanty?"

"Ho, bless you, I 'ad a jawb at cookin' ven I vas hup for 'Ebden's."

"Did he take hold at cooking supper well, Sam?" asked Walter."

"I vas too much done hout vith valkin' to get supper, sir, but I'll show you in the mornin'."

"I'm going away before daylight," said Walter, "but if you were up for Hebden's last winter —"

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"I vas, sir. Mr. 'Ebden told me he'd 'eard you wanted a cook." He pronounced all his double o's like "oo" in boot.

"Well, that was pretty decent of Mr. Hebden, after all," said Walter, surprised.

"Vot vages, sir?" put in the cockney.

"Thirty dollars a month if you can cook well."

"Hall right, sir. I hengages for a month. You'll see — I'm a pystry byker by tryde."

It was soon obvious that the little man understood dishwashing at any rate, for he helped Sam with alacrity. Walter, worn out, went to bed early and slept heavily till Sam woke him at earliest dawn. The new cook was raking the fire together skilfully.

"Oh, I guess you'll do, Jorrocks," said Walter, gladly.

"Me, sir? Vy, I'm a pystry byker by tryde!"

So Walter drove away with Duffy and a light heart, breakfasted at Jaffray's, and as the steamer took him down the broad, brown stream, rejoiced exceedingly that Sam was delivered from his troubles. But alas, poor Sam!

CHAPTER IV.

A SUBSTITUTE FOR MEIGS.

AT Garroch Walter was busy for three days — hiring navvies, buying supplies, and explaining the situation of the contract to Mr. Gemmill, who was much pleased with his protégé's energy and clearheadedness.

"Man, but you're developing, Wally!" said the banker. "It's only three weeks since you started, and you're a man already. I'm thinking the responsibilities will be heavy enough on ye now."

"I feel them, sir," said Walter, soberly. "But I think I can carry them. If only I could have seen my father — and mother, too!"

"Aye, I was thinking ye'd be a bit homesick, lad. House all shut up, eh? Looks lonely like. Well, if your father was there, ye couldn't talk business with him. Doctor Mostyn wouldn't let ye. He says your father must just have his

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brain resting for many a week to come. Have you heard from your mother since they went south?"

"Yes, sir, there was a letter here for Sam, and I opened it. They'd got as far as Washington. Father was improving."

"I make no doubt he'll be all right, lad. And I'm deceived if you don't make a pretty penny while he's gone."

This was the hope that sustained the young boss in his labors. But sometimes a dreadful thought assailed him. What if he were neglecting some part essential to the completion of the job? What if his father had foreseen some great difficulty of which Walter was unaware? What if that were the reason he had demanded prices so high, and especially high for the deeper excavation which Walter had undertaken, and on account of which he was doubling the force of his gang? But the youth could imagine nothing for which he had not provided, and he was always soon able to shake off these fears.

On the fourth day after leaving Sam, Walter arrived at Elbow Carry with thirty-seven men, including a new cook, for two cooks would be

needed for the doubled force. He did not bring a second blacksmith. Meigs could do all the work, for the steel points lasted well in drilling the soft limestone, and Walter meant to give Meigs an increase of pay.

He had much confidence that this essential man would not leave him without long notice. The young boss, honest himself, reckoned on finding all men "square."

Jaffray met Walter with effusion and incessant two-eyed winking.

"By golly," he cried, "you have brought a big gang!" Then he lowered his voice to a whisper. "That's right; Hebden will have to pay the shot, anyhow."

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Walter.

"What? You ain't twigged that point yet? Didn't I tell you he's got no real use for that channel you're making?"

"Yes; but why did he make the contract?"

"Because he's a pig-headed English greenhorn, that consults no man of sense. Because his head is full of old-country notions about the advantage of draining fens. Don't you see it yet?"

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"No, I don't. The land will be well drained, won't it?"

"You bet it will. But never mind. Don't say a word, I tell you. I'll explain it to you in time. Mum, mind you. And I guess you're needed at the job right away."

Leaving his men and supplies to be forwarded by wagons, Walter hurried rapidly with a light buggy to the shanty and Sam. On entering the door he found his young brother greasy, tired-looking, busy about the fire, while Jorrocks was washing the dinner dishes.

"Why, what on earth, Sam? You cooking?" cried Walter. Jorrocks turned his head away, and seemed to shrink deep into his boots.

"I've been cooking right along," said Sam. "Jorrocks may be a pystry byker, but in beans-bying and potato-biling and pork-cooking—Great Scott!"

"Can't he cook?"

"Cook! No more than a baby!"

"What do you mean by such a trick?" cried Walter, angrily, to Jorrocks, who turned to face him with hands extended in explanation.

"Let him be, Walt. He's a good cook's

mate, anyhow. I don't know what I'd have done without him," said Sam.

"But you told me you could cook!" shouted Walter to Jorrocks.

"No sir, please. Hi told you Hi'd 'ad a jawb of coo-kin'. I vas coo-ook's mate ven I vas hup for 'Ebden's, and I thowt Hi'd learned enough. But now Hi know Hi didn't learn nothing to speak of."

"Well, you are a queer rascal!"

"No, sir, please. Honly too 'opeful."

"And you're not a pastry-baker by trade?"

"H'im sorry Hi lied about that, sir. But Hi wanted a jawb so bad! I *vas* so hungry, sir!"

The little man looked so repentant and comically impudent at once that Walter both pitied and laughed at him. Then the face of Jorrocks cleared, and he came forward with a confidential air.

"The trewth is, sir," he said, striking a proud attitude, "Hi'm an 'oss-jawekey by tryde."

"A horse-jockey?"

"Yes, sir. Hi've rode at Hawscot and Noo-market, and the Curragh of Kildare wunet, and

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"Cook, eh?"

"Coo-ook? Yes, sir, good enough for a lot of Hirish."

"Well, you're the most impudent specimen I've met."

"That's wot Mr. 'Ebden told me, sir. He wco-uldn't give me me py. 'Go down to the Loon Lake jawb,' says 'e. 'Hi'm told they want a coo-ook like you there.'"

"Oh, that was how he came to send you, eh? And he wouldn't pay you?"

"No, sir, and Hi vas dead broke. So vot could a poor man do? Lord, sir, if honly you'd let me sty on!"

"Bob Jorrocks is a good cook's mate," said Sam again. "I like Bob Jorrocks though he's such a shocking humbug."

"Thank you, sir," said Jorrocks.

"He can help the new cook; you're fetching one up, aren't you, Walt?" said Sam, laughing.

"If you'll 'ire me hover again, you'll find Hi'll do more than my dooty, sir." Bob touched his forelock to Walter.

"You can stay at twelve dollars a month, that rate of wages to begin when you started, Jorrocks," said Walter. Jorrocks had probably won this concession by his very deferential manners, for all boys like to be treated as important men.

"Hall right, sir!" cried Jorrocks, much relieved. "Hand Hi'll get heven with 'Ebden yet, too. Hi've got something to tell you, sir. It's my dooty, now Hi'm 'ired."

"What do you mean, Jorrocks?"

Jorrocks drew Walter to one side and whispered, "Wot if your blacksmith was going to leave?"

Walter stared at Jorrocks with something like horror. Meigs had been engaged and under pay nearly a week before the job began. His month would be out on the morrow. He could then legally go. If he should do so, seventy men would be thrown idle till Walter could bring on another blacksmith. Blacksmiths were scarce. And forfeits would be incurred by stopping the job for anything but bad weather.

"What makes you think he's going?" asked Walter.

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"Mr. 'Ebden, sir," whispered Jorrocks. "'E was down 'ere at noon yesterday. Hi see 'im takin' Meigs into the woods, so I follered 'em very quiet, and 'eard 'im hoffer Meigs big py to go to his depot shanty and blacksmith there," and Jorrocks went on detailing all he had overheard.

Thus Walter, by his leniency to the "'oss-jawekey," had received a valuable warning. He meditated over the information carefully. It seemed to him that he might at once triumph over and hold Meigs by good management.

Accordingly, in the shanty that evening—the shanty noisy with the loud talk between two large gangs of Garroch navvies who had not seen each other for nearly a month—he waited, with good-natured looks, for the blacksmith to spring the surprise which he thought he had in store.

Walter had spent a good many odd hours of boyhood in watching Garroch blacksmiths at work, and he had also carefully observed Meigs's manipulation of the drilling tools. He wondered if another blacksmith would be so very hard to find.

It was not till most of the men had turned

into their bunks that the blacksmith sidled around gradually till he sat by Walter. Meigs was a broad-faced, black-haired, olive-tinted man of thirty-five, who had worked in many shops, and felt himself so vastly experienced that he could easily "euchre" a mere boy: He spoke in a woolly, wheedling voice, with a most deferential air: —

"There'll be a sight of work for a man that's a blacksmith here after this, Mr. Walter. Seventy men and more now!"

"Yes; no more loafing for you, Meigs," said Walter, sharply.

"Well, sir, I don't know as I've been doin' no loafin' as I knows on," said Meigs, in the tone of an injured, patient man.

"I'm not complaining of you, Meigs. There'll be about twice as many points to sharpen now, that's all."

"A man might say that it'd ought to be a bit more pay for a man as is a good man at his trade, sir."

"Yes, a man might. And a man might be far wrong if he did say so."

Meigs looked suspiciously at Walter's impas-

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sive face. It betokened no such bantering spirit as his slightly mocking tones had seemed to carry.

"Oh, well, Mr. Walter, I ain't heard of no more pay for me yet, sir. Not as I'm doubtin' but you'll do the right thing, Mr. Walter. And my month's pay is due to-night."

"So it is. And here's your money, Meigs. Just sign the pay-sheet." Walter had been sitting by his rude desk, and drew forth the bills and the document.

Though Meigs was surprised by the cool alacrity of the young boss, he smiled with satisfaction at getting his pay, for he had feared that it might be held back. After pocketing the cash, he remarked, as if in much doubt, "I don't suppose but what you'd just as lief's not I stayed on, Mr. Walter."

"Were you thinking of leaving, Meigs?"

"Well, I ain't sayin', so fur, as I was meanin' any such thing. On'y this here job kind o' seems to me it wants a tip-top blacksmith, and wants a man that'll keep sober and steady right along."

"Certainly, Meigs. I don't want seventy

men idle on my hands on account of one man drunk. You're a sober man anyhow."

"I allus was, Mr. Walter. And I'm told the job's got to go on right along or the contract's busted."

"Oh, well, that's none of your business, Meigs," for Walter felt that his aggressiveness would tend to disconcert the enemy.

"Well, I'd ought to have pay accordin' to the size of the gang." Meigs spoke with some vexation.

"Double pay?"

"Yes, about that."

"Can't do it, Meigs. I'll give you ten dollars a month more, on certain conditions."

"Ten dollars! 'tain't a consideration."

"All right."

"What's the conditions?" said Meigs, so surprised as to incautiously betray his inward thought that he might stay.

"That you sign to stay on till the job's done."

"Not much — not for no ten dollars extra."

"Very well — you're going to-morrow, eh?"

Meigs made no immediate reply. He won-

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dered whether Walter had engaged another blacksmith during his absence at Garroch. But he was not so stupefied by Walter's manner as to doubt, on reflection, that he himself really had the young boss on the hip. Meigs concluded that Walter was simply "bluffing."

"Well, you're jokin', Mr. Walter," he said, affecting a laugh. "Nat'rilly and in course you're jokin'. Ten dollars ain't a circumstance to what I see."

"What do you see, Meigs?"

"Why, with seventy men idle you'll lose more in two days than all the pay I'd ask would amount to."

"Yes, eh? How much are you going to ask?"

"Seventy-five dollars a month, 'stead of forty."

"I wish you may get it, Meigs."

"So I kin, from Mr. Hebden."

"Well, I wish you luck, Meigs. Good-night, —I'm going to bed."

Meigs sat for some time completely taken aback. But the more he pondered the more certain he became that Walter was simply

"bluffing." Now he knew that one who does that rashly likes to be provided with some way of "climbing down" easily.

So he went to Walter's bunk and whispered wheedlingly and winked hard.

"I understand---you done it well, and I don't deny but what you done it smart, Mr. Walter. I'll give in I was bluffin' a bit, too. Say seventy dollars, and I'll stop right along."

"Meigs," said Walter, rising up on his elbow, "you're trying to blackmail me. Now you can't. Go to Mr. Hebden and be hanged to you. Good-night."

For Jorrocks had told Walter that Mr. Hebden's offer to the blacksmith was one of sixty dollars a month, which Meigs could not obtain except by going two hundred miles back into the forest.

"You can't get another blacksmith in a week," said Meigs, wrathfully.

"Maybe yes, and maybe no. Anyhow there's more ways of killing a dog than choking him with butter."

This enigmatical phrase went to bunk with Meigs, echoed in his dreams, was clearly in his

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ears when he rose in the morning. What could the young boss be up to?

"Anyhow," said Meigs to himself, "I can get sixty from Hebden, and I'll start after breakfast."

Walter ate that meal with much more anxiety than he showed. He could not be quite sure of success in what he meant to try. If he failed, the job would stop for days—in case Meigs departed. If he failed, his men would laugh at him more or less secretly, and his authority would be hopelessly impaired.

But he knew he must take the risk. He could not afford to be bullied by Meigs, for the blacksmith's success might set all the other men to bullying for an advance of wages. As it was, he felt that the quick-witted Irishmen were narrowly watching him, in some expectation that he would "squeeze" Meigs, but with more hope that Meigs would squeeze him, and so give them a line of policy for the end of the coming week, when many of them would have completed their first month's engagement.

Pat Lynch put a coal on his pipe, crammed it down with a stick, and threw his blouse over

his shoulders. It was the signal for going to work. Seventy men followed him. Walter went, too.

Meigs, packing his clothes-bag, felt at once very mean and angry. He knew that there were not tools sharpened for half a day's work. He seemed to feel the eyes of Sam, Jorrocks, and the new cook sticking into his back.

They only were left in the shanty with the blacksmith. No words were exchanged. Sam, relieved from cooking, was shrewdly watching Meigs.

"*Clank-clank-clonk—trippety-trip-trip—clank, trip, clank,*" came the sound of drills and striking hammers. Soon the chorus of steel on rock was at its merriest. Meigs listened with derision. Every stroke would dull steel points. No blacksmith to make them good! Meigs sat down—the clanking deeply impressed him with a sense that Walter must come back and offer him his own terms.

But what was that small beating, quicker than any other, that suddenly came into the metallic din? Meigs started up in amazement.

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He knew well the note of his own anvil and hammer. No, his ears must have deceived him! There was now no anvil sound. Then *clankety-clink* came again the clear ringing of hammer on steel. Yes, there was a blacksmith at work!

Sam grinned to see Meigs wonder. Meigs picked up his bundle, and took the straight road for Hebden with the boy's crackling laugh stinging his ears.

There was silence at the anvil now. "He's filing the red point," thought Meigs. The silence continued. "He'll be tempering the steel now," thought the blacksmith. Then, after a little, the merry anvil notes came again through the pinery to the walking man.

They seemed to taunt him with having acted like a fool. They clinked, "You're going to bury yourself far in the woods. You've been mean, mean, mean. You don't want to go. You were bluffing. And a boy called you down. Ho-ho-ho, Jim Meigs — mean, mean, mean!"

Where could Walter have concealed the new blacksmith? Who was he? Was he one of the new men who had passed as a navvy? Meigs'

curiosity overcame him. He laid his bundle down by the roadside, and cautiously stole through the pinery to reconnoitre the forge.

Could he trust his eyes? From the edge of the wood he could clearly see the new blacksmith, who was plying the hammer rather awkwardly but still effectively. How on earth could he have picked up so much knack?

Then it flashed on Meigs that the sharpening of drill and jumper points was so simple an operation that it could be safely left—all but the tempering—to young apprentices. Meigs remembered how quickly he himself had, at eighteen, learned the trick of heating, hammering, and filing the points. "The young boss was always mighty handy," reflected the blacksmith; for it was Walter himself who stood at the anvil!

"So this is what the young boss has picked up while watching meself and other blacksmiths at work!" thought Meigs. He had himself often unconsciously been giving Walter lessons at odd times in that very forge. But was it possible the lad could have caught the secret of tempering the points? Meigs

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could no longer restrain his curiosity. He left the cover of the pines, and walked straight for the forge.

The back of Walter's flannel shirt was toward the coming blacksmith. Just as Meigs came upon the cinders round the anvil Walter thrust a point into the half-barrel of water. He gave it a flourish in the very manner of Meigs, drew it forth and gazed intently at it, yet seeing Meigs out of the corner of his eye.

A straw color, blent with tints of blue and orange, was ~~quivering~~ on the hot point. From the thickest part the blue stole slowly to the ~~hot~~ edge. Just as it was chasing away the last vestiges of straw color Walter plunged the drill deep into the water and held it there, while ~~he~~ smiled amiably at Meigs. Then he drew forth the tool and flung it with a look of inquiry at the blacksmith's feet.

The journeyman picked up the drill, and stared at it with new surprise. It was a rough job, but the temper was perfect. Meigs knew that the jumper would do.

He was fairly beaten at all points, and he

was one of the men who are not bad fellows when completely overcome.

"Mr. Walter, you're a mighty smart young chap," said Meigs. "I don't want to go anyhow. I'll own up I was partly bluffin'."

"You used me meanly, Meigs."

"I did, and I'm sorry for it."

"Say no more," said Walter. "I'm glad you'll stay. I guess I could do the trick for three or four days, Meigs, but I don't want to. Will you take right hold? I'll give you fifty dollars a month and you'll sign for the job."

"Done," said Meigs, heartily. And so that trouble passed by the young boss.

But it had not passed for Meigs yet. That night the Irishmen chaffed him unmercifully. They requested him to "put his head to soak." They admonished him to "kape it safe in a bag." They assured him "the young boss does be thinkin' wid his head whilst ye're shnorin', and that's the way he's too shmart for schamers."

But Meigs bore all philosophically. He even requested Walter to abstain from trying to check the chaffing men.

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"It pleases you and it don't hurt me, you villains," he laughed, for he did not lack spirit. "Blather away and be hanged to you. You're only a lot of wild bog-trotters anyhow. And some day you'll get a taste of the young boss yourselves, or I dunno. There's one thing I know, though—I never saw so many Irish together without them going in for some kind of divilment against the contractor."

CHAPTER V.

NO END OF TROUBLES.

WITH his blacksmith and cook engaged up to the end of the job, with plenty of charcoal arranged for, with seventy men clanging away and regarding him as a young miracle of management, Walter felt the ground to be solid under his feet. He completed his sense of security by inducing Jaffray to buy and send down the fresh supplies the shanty needed daily, and then, freed from minor cares, he turned his attention seriously to an important question.

The end of October had come. An estimate of the amount of rock excavated was to be made. According to the contract, this calculation should be prepared by Mr. Leclerc, a surveyor whose headquarters were at Elbow Carry. He was to act for Mr. Hebden in the matter.

But Hebden had not sent Leclerc to make

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the measurements. From this Walter feared that the cranky little Englishman meant to delay payment of the estimate, which would be due on the fifth of November.

Walter would soon need money. The credit given him by Mr. Gemmill was nearly exhausted, for the demands on it had been greater than were foreseen. And the young boss felt much puzzled to know how he might best compel Mr. Hebden, whose disposition was intensely litigious, to pay over the cash needed for the coming month. At this crisis he bethought him of the winking wisdom of Jaffray, and went to the Carry to obtain the hotel-keeper's advice.

"You've done well to come to me," said Jaffray, closing both eyes for a full minute and pondering the problem. "See now, — can you make the estimate yourself? Of course you can."

"Yes, I've made it already. No trouble in that. It was an easy job of cross-sectioning."

"I reckoned it would be," said Jaffray, ignoring that he himself did not know what cross-sectioning meant. "Well, then, why not go straight ahead? Why not present your estimate to Hebden?"



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"But it's got to be certified by Mr. Leclerc."

"Certified by him, eh? Is Leclerc at home?"

"Yes. But he won't go down without Hebden's orders. Hebden was to pay him for making the estimate. That's not much of a job."

"How long would it take him to do it, my son?"

"Five hours, maybe — surely less than a day."

"Did you offer to pay him for doing it?"

"No, I never thought of that. You see he was to act for Hebden. Perhaps he'll act for me."

"You'll find he'll act for a ten-dollar bill. If he don't, he'll hear from me. He's owing me fifty-seven dollars for teaming these two year back. Say, you're just as free to hire Leclerc as you are to hire anybody else. Go and hire him, then."

Walter found this very easy. The ten-dollar bill and the mention of Jaffray's name were enough for the impecunious surveyor.

"Certainly," said he, slowly. "I s'pose I'm free to take pay to work for you or anybody else. But you don't expect Hebden will honor the estimate I make as your agent?"

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"We'll see about that," said Walter, guided by Jaffray's instructions.

So Leclerc went down to the shanty, checked Walter's cross-sectioning, prepared three copies of the estimate for October, made affidavit to its correctness, and departed with his ten-dollar bill. Then Walter, by Jaffray's counsel, sent one copy to Mr. Bemis, the bank agent at the Carry, with a notification that he would claim three thousand dollars' forfeit, as well as the amount of the estimate, in case it was not paid by the fifth of November. He sent a similar notification, with another copy of Leclerc's estimate, to Mr. Hebden, and anxiously awaited results.

"You'll see he'll come down all right," said Jaffray. "He'll see you've got ready for a lawsuit, and he'll know you've got him tight."

"But if he don't come down?"

"Then you'll shove the work right along, and he'll have to pay the cost, besides the forfeit."

"Yes, if I had money, but I'm nearly out. And if I don't get the job done by the first of January, then we forfeit all due, and fifteen hundred dollars besides."

"Geewhittaker, son! It looks like's if I'd have to wake Hebden up about that hay sooner'n I calculated."

"I don't understand what you mean, Mr. Jaffray."

"That's kind of queer, too, son. But you will when the time comes. Ain't I ever told you that the old Hebden that's dead contracted to give me the cutting of five hundred acres of wild hay off that marsh for three years to come?"

"I didn't know that. But what's that got to do with it, sir?"

"Beats all how little young folks *do* see!" said Jaffray. "Get your thinker to work on it. I ain't going to tell you. All I say is, keep mum. I don't want Hebden to get out too easy. What scares me is that your cash is running out. But just wait till the fifth—then we'll know."

During the three days which elapsed before the money for the estimate was due Walter did put his "thinker" to work, as Jaffray had advised. But as he knew nothing of agriculture or the habits of wild hay on the particular land involved, or its value in a lumbering country,

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he still failed to understand the bearing of the hotel-keeper's remarks.

On the afternoon of the fifth Walter drove up to the branch bank at Elbow Carry. He was deeply anxious. Some of his men had demanded advances which he could not pay unless Hebden should have paid the estimate. He owed Jaffray over two hundred dollars for supplies and teaming. He feared that his men would quit work if they found him in financial difficulties.

Again he was absorbed in the opinion that he must finish the job to get a profit from it. He longed, too, for the satisfaction of completing it. What man of action but dislikes to abandon work partly done, even if paid for the part? To compel Mr. Hebden, by slow process, to pay the whole outlay, and damages besides, would be, Walter felt, poor consolation for stopping the job. Besides, where could his father find money for a lawsuit? So it was with a complication of fears at his heart that the young boss entered the branch bank.

"Mr. Bemis, has Mr. Hebden paid that estimate?" asked Walter.

"Yes, this morning."

Walter's heart jumped so big with joy that it seemed to float him off the office floor.

"I'm glad of that," he said as calmly as possible. "I was needing money. I'll just draw out five hundred dollars."

"I'm afraid you can't, young man."

"No — why not?" Walter almost shouted.

"It's not paid to your order. It's paid to Walter Gibbs, senior, your father."

"I'm acting for him — it's all right."

"Have you power of attorney?"

"No — but —"

"You can't draw a cent of the estimate without it."

"But my father is two thousand miles away, and he can't do any business."

"I'm afraid that was Hebden's calculation," said Mr. Bemis. "I'm sorry, but so it stands. I've no authority in the world to pay out any of that money to your father's son."

The young boss walked out into the crisp November weather feeling as if his brain were paralyzed. He could see that he had no resource against Hebden. Hebden had complied with the contract. Walter had but seventy-two dol-

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lars to his credit. More than that was needed that very afternoon. If he failed to make the small advances that his men had asked, they would suspect him of being bankrupt. And if they should strike work, his father would be ruined. Hebden could claim forfeit, and probably large damages also, for delay.

Experienced people may think it strange that Walter's mind did not instantly turn to Mr. Gemmill; but he had grown into a habit of thinking that he would repay part of Mr. Gemmill's advance out of this very estimate. The idea of appealing to the kind banker for more aid had been wholly outside of his calculations. Now he was so disturbed, and felt so much need for a period of reflection, that he desired to conceal himself even from Jaffray, who had suddenly become to his eyes a creditor whom he could not pay.

Jaffray, however, was not so easily avoided. He came out to the shed when Walter went there for his horse, and insisted on learning the particulars.

"Ho, son!" cried the tavern-keeper, "Hebden's acted right enough. What are you troubled

about? Why, you're all right; no bones broken that I can see. Telegraph to Mr. Gemmill."

"But I can't ask him for more money."

"Oh, go 'way! He deals in money. It's no favor. He'll make you pay for the accommodation."

"But I can't give him a cent of security."

"Well, son, you're pretty green at business. Don't you see that the money Hebden has paid to your father's credit is Mr. Gemmill's good-enough security for advances to you? It lies to your father's order. Gemmill will get a check from your father by mail on Bemis. Pooh! I'm surprised at you feeling beat. Why, I'll let you have five hundred dollars myself as quick as wink," and then Jaffray colored fiery red at his own apparent allusion to his own infirmity.

"Thank you, Mr. Jaffray; you're awfully kind to me," said Walter. "I don't know what I'd have done without you."

"Oh, I guess you'd wriggle through," said Jaffray. "You're polite and you're modest, and you know enough to take advice from Experience. That's why I like you. Then you

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ain't always leaning on somebody else, either. You can do for yourself lots of ways — uncommon well, too. I'll bet you'll make a first-class man. And besides, I've got a sharp stick for Hebden, and you're the chap that's going to drive it in," for the tavern-keeper's vindictiveness to an enemy was as constant as his helpfulness to a friend. He never forgot that Hebden had called him Windy Jim to his face, besides interfering with his teaming business.

So the young boss returned to the shanty with money in his pocket and hope high in his heart. It seemed to him, though, that the men were surprised at his readiness to make the usual advances. Had Mr. Hebden already spread a rumor that he was in financial distress? If so, he quieted the fears of the navvies for the moment.

But it was with anxiety that Walter noted the signs that trouble was ready for him if Mr. Gemmill should fail to supply his need. A strike? A strike would be ruinous, for there was little enough time remaining to complete the work, enlarged as it had been by his undertaking the deep cut. Walter had even thought of putting up another shanty and employing fifty more men.

On the morning of the sixth of November he started again for Garroch, feeling it would be better to see his banker face to face. And the last thing he said to Pat Lynch, his foreman, was this:—

“Pat, take on any good men that come to hire. I’ll spread it at the Carry that you want quarrymen. We could bunk ten more. I want the job rushed from this out,” for now the thought that the rainy season was nigh at hand worried the young boss, though he had no adequate notion of the immense trouble it would give him.

Mr. Gemmill made no difficulties about renewing Walter’s credit.

“I’m pleased with you, lad, for coming to face me. You’ll find it always good policy to see the man you’re dealing with in this world. Yon man Jaffray is a sensible creature—if he is a tavern-keeper—but it’s a trade I despise.

“I’ll just drop a line to your mother, and to you, too, on this business,” he went on. “It’s likely your father will be able enough to send me a check, and if he’s not, your mother can act for him. Tell her all you’ve been doing on the

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job, in case your father may be able to take an interest. And mind I'm trusting you to tell me every time as promptly as this time, of any difficulty that occurs."

Walter wrote the suggested letter to his mother without an idea of the degree in which it would affect his future operations, and hurried back to Elbow Carry and his shanty at all speed.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon of November the eighth when he again heard the clanking of his drills and the tinkling of Meigs' hammer on anvil and steel. But somehow the din sounded slow and dull. "Is it," thought Walter, "that the haze of the warm November day, the blaze of autumn on the hills, the brown grasses of the marsh, the seeming sleepiness of the air, affect my senses? Or are the men really dawdling at their work?"

Jorroek and the cook were certainly not dawdling in the shanty, but were actively cleaning up after dinner and preparing a baking of bread. Sam was not there. Walter but looked into the shanty when he asked, "Where's my brother?"

"E's down at the jawb, sir," said Jorrocks, and came to the door as Walter went out. "Mr.

Walter," whispered the little man, "there's trouble a-brewin'."

"What do you mean, Jorrocks?"

"It's got about that you're 'ard up for cash."

"Pooh—that's not so. Are you afraid of your pay, Jorrocks?"

"Not me,—no, sir, Hi'd stand by you if I vas,—you treated me so decent. But that there Hirish foreman has took on noo men. One of 'em's a reg'lar mutinous duffer. It's him is spreadin' the stories. 'E used to work for 'Ebden and 'e lives in vun of 'Ebden's 'ouses and Hi'm thinkin' it's 'Ebden that's sent him 'ere to make all the jolly trouble 'e can. Mr. Sam is watching 'im—'is name's Schlitzer—'e's a big Prooshun."

"And the men have got it into their heads that I can't pay?"

"That's it, sir. They been a-talkin' strike."

"I'll soon settle that," cried Walter, angrily, and walked straight through the pinery to the work.

He was somewhat fatigued by his journey and two nights of bad sleep. At the thought of the men discrediting him his heart was hot. He

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knew he had done more than his duty by them; taken much trouble to give them more than usual comfort; made unusual advances to them, and altogether deserved kindness at their hands. So his temper was hot when he came to the edge of the excavation, and saw the gang strung along the creek bed, making a mere pretence of work. Sam hurried across the excavation to meet Walter.

"I don't know what's got into the men," said Sam. "Pat's half afraid to drive them. See that big fellow across there? That's a Prussian named Schlitzer. Pat says he's been telling the men that Hebden says you're dead broke, and they won't get their pay."

Walter left Sam and walked straight across the channel to the big Prussian, a tall, very powerful, fair-haired, sullen-looking man, who was distinctly loafing instead of plying the ball drill against which he leaned.

"Get a move on you there, my man," said the young boss, sharply. Then he called to the foreman, "Lynch, what's this man doing here? Is he paid for standing idle?"

Instantly at his word of sharp command, the

drills and jumpers rang with activity. All but that of the Prussian. He sneered insolently in Walter's very face and said, loudly : —

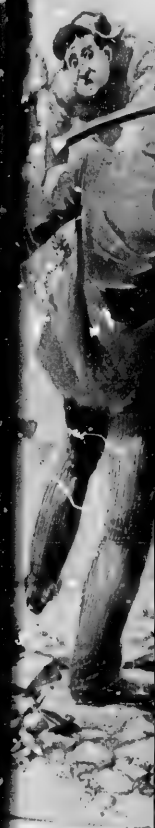
"Pay — vot pay? You don't got no money for pay, dot so — ya, dot so."

"I've got money for you right now," said Walter. "Sam, what's this fellow's time? Lynch, I wonder you didn't sack him long ago."

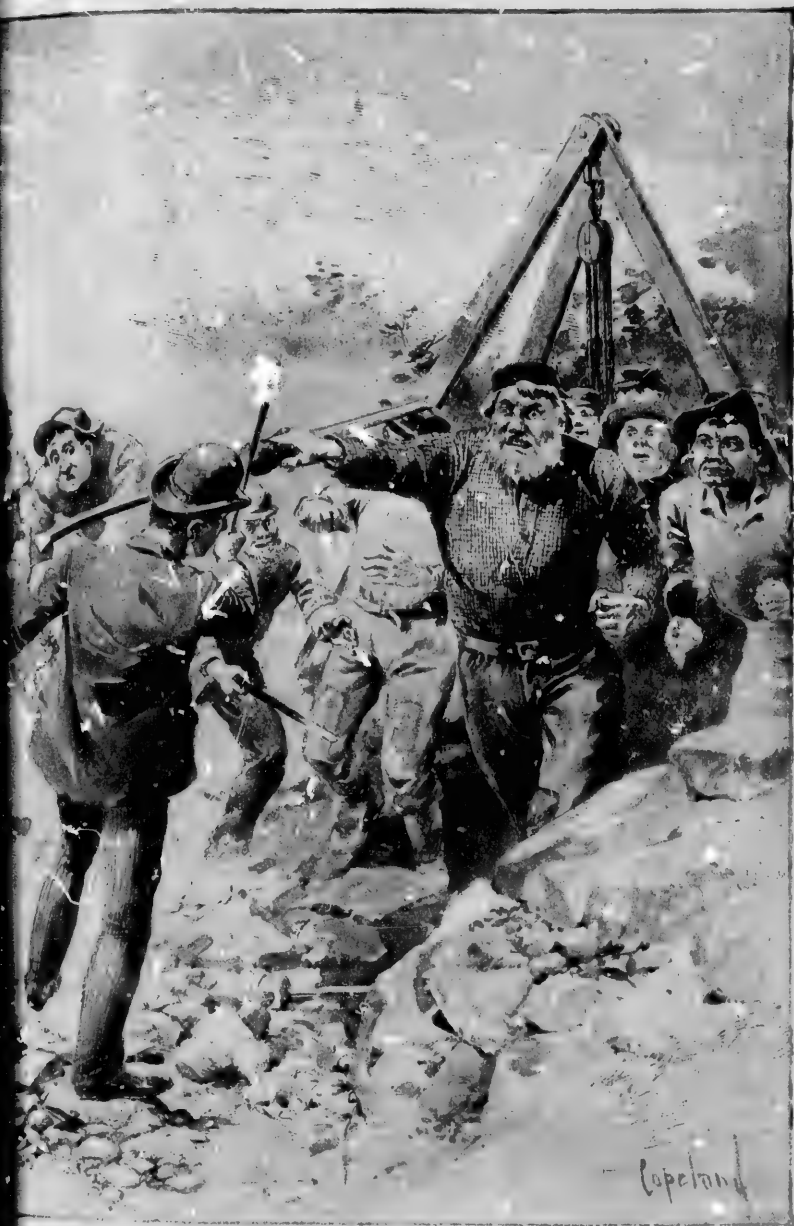
Now Walter had made a great mistake in speaking thus, in interfering with his foreman in the presence of the men. Pat hung back sulkily, the sound of the drills fell away to a little clinking, a strike seemed imminent, and Schlitzer, feeling enraged, threw himself into a defiant attitude.

The next moment he had called Walter a foul name, and the moment afterwards Walter's indignant fist smashed full into the Prussian's face. The young boss had lost his head entirely with rage at the vile insult, and in an instant the navvies were crowding round the fight.

Walter was a very powerful and active youth, but Schlitzer was a giant. He was not, how-



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ever, a boxer. Long trained in Prussian military service, he looked to weapons.

As Walter drew back, suddenly quite cool and ashamed in clearly seeing himself wrong, and yet by his coolness all the more efficient for fighting, the Prussian stooped for a tamping iron about three feet long. One blow of it would have dashed out any man's brains. He was lifting it madly, when Walter, closing in at a bound, seized it in his left hand.

For an instant they stood, faces close together. Schlitzer tugged twice at the iron. It seemed as if his wrath had driven him out of his senses. His eye fell on the ball drill standing in its hole close by. Accustomed to bayonet exercise, his hands left the tamping iron to Walter and snatched up the drill.

It was about seven feet long, a heavy, sharp-pointed, terrible weapon. The giant threw his arm back to lunge, and drove the broadened point straight at Walter's head.

There was a clash of steel — with the tamping iron Walter weakly warded the murderous thrust. But the ward was enough — that and Walter's quick dodging of his head aside. The

point of the drill barely grazed and cut his left ear. Had it struck his face it would have passed through, and a foot beyond his head.

As Walter threw out his left hand and grasped the drill he heard clear above the shouts of the men the voices of Sam, of Meigs, of Pat Lynch and of Jorrocks, all trying to reach the scene of combat.

"Knock the murderous vilyan down, wan of ye!" yelled Pat.

"Let me through," shouted Sam, trying to scramble over the very shoulders of the crowd to Walter's aid.

"Give it to him, boss," roared Meigs.

"Hi'll show the bloomin' Prooshian!" screamed Jorrocks, and strangely, it was from his path only that the crowding men fell back, some with howls of agony.

Schlitzer had wrenched the drill from Walter's weaker grasp, and thrown himself almost into position for another lunge. In that instant Walter felt that his life was to pay for his moment of wild anger. A terrible meaning was in the Prussian's fierce blue eyes.

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with pain. His mighty arm, which had been fully drawn back, fell down. The drill clanked from his hands to the rock, and with another howl of woe he ran from the red-hot jumper. Jorrocks had earnestly laid it against his leg and now threatened him with a second branding.

The "'oss-jockey," following Walter to the work, had seized the jumper from the coals of the forge as he ran to the rescue. With its red-hot point he had forced a passage easily. Now he stood waving it defiantly, dancing like a misshapen goblin, lunging toward Schlitzer, and shouting "come on." But the Prussian was running for the cooling water of Loon Lake as fast as his legs could carry him, while an immense roar of laughter from the navvies pursued him to the edge.

"Bedad, it's a fighter yez are, Jorrocks," said Pat. "And are you hurted, Mr. Walter?"

"No — not a bit."

"He was for mur'herin' you, the vilyan of the world! I could bate the life out of him. Shall we go at him?"

"Leave him alone, Pat. I was wrong to strike him. I lost my temper."

"You wasn't wrong, then. Sure I admire the shpunk av ye. And him as big as a house! Begor, the lies he's been tellin' the bhys. Ye're not out of money, thin, at all?"

"No, I'm not," said Walter. "But we've had enough of this now. The work's waiting."

"Come, min," shouted Pat, with a new sense of authority. "This job's to be dhruv. What are ye standin' round for? There's plenty of money—it's the big bounce any wan of ye'll get that does be dhriftin' round this day. Rattle down thim holes. Whoop, there!"

Walter had triumphed, but he felt somewhat dismayed at having lost his head for a few moments. That was "not good business." Yet he blamed himself little for the blow he had struck. He saw nothing wrong in replying forcibly to a brutal insult; what shocked him was that he had been as one bereft of his senses. And he was sick at heart with recollection that he had clearly heard in the dincries of "Give him wan, Schlitzer," and "Bate the loife out of him, Schlitzer," from men that he had believed to be heartily his friends.

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CHAPTER VI.

RISING WATER.

ROUGH navvies, wholly uneducated, much given to horse-play and brawling, yield quickly to courage and audacity a loyalty that kindness can with difficulty win from them. Though Walter had been ashamed of losing his self-control in dealing with Schlitzer, he soon felt that his combative nature had inspired him wisely, for his readiness to strike a man far bigger than himself had fixed him more firmly than ever in the admiration and confidence of his men. They were, for one thing, quite sure that no boss in need of money would have ventured to carry things with so high a hand.

If Walter had been older and more philosophical, he might have been in no wise pained by the evidence that he had won by the wild wrath of a moment what his indulgence of the men had not wholly secured. But their

ingratitude rankled in his young heart. He began to doubt whether any of the gang but Jorrocks and Meigs were sincerely attached to him. And this gave him a new air, stern, peremptory, hard.

Under the coldness that had come into his blue eyes the men, like so many children, winced. But they obeyed. His mere demeanor drove the work up to the 15th of November as it had never been driven before. Moreover, the men, feeling the approach of winter, when work for them would be scarce, keenly feared discharge, now that they knew their pay was secure if they worked on.

Rain began to fall on the fifteenth of the month. Up to this time the weather had been unusually dry and fine. Loon Lake, low as it had been in October, had continued to dwindle. Imagine a vast and very shallow saucer, with an uncommonly deep depression in its middle. This depression may stand for Loon Lake, and the shallow sides of the saucer for the two-miles-wide low hay land that lay on three sides of the water.

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poured, not from the sky only, but in little streams from the wet surrounding forest and more or less distant hills. Walter, sitting in the shanty, with all his men idle and under wages, moodily listened to the downpour on the roof of scoops.

A hundred dollars would not pay for the direct loss by each day's rain, to say nothing of the loss of profits unearned, and the danger that the job might not be finished as contracted for. Yet the fears that soaked into the young boss with three days of steady downpour were trifling to the dismay with which he read a letter that came on the morning when fine weather had returned.

His mother wrote from St. Augustine, Florida. His father, she said, had so far recovered that she had read to him that letter in which Walter asked for a check and authority to use the moneys Mr. Hebden had paid, or should thereafter pay, on the contract — the letter in which Walter had given some account of his work on the job.

"Your father was greatly pleased on the whole," Mrs. Gibbs wrote, "and I send you the

check for the money in Mr. Bemis's hands and the papers your father signed. But he seemed a good deal puzzled because you did not say anything about the dam. He said of course you must have built the dam when you concluded to take out the deep rock, and he wondered you had not said anything about it. He worried over this all night, and next day the doctor positively forbade him to do any kind of business, or even let his mind run on business.

"Indeed," the letter went on, "the whole matter fatigued your father so much that he had a sort of relapse, and has again sunk into that curious, listless, sleepy, indifferent state he was in before. You had better write and tell us all about the dam, so as to ease his mind when he recovers interest again.

"We expect to be home before Christmas, for, physically, your father has picked up wonderfully. It is only that his brain is still suffering from some sort of pressure due to the blow on his head. But the doctor says he will certainly be quite well before Christmas."

As the young boss read the letter, his brain fairly reeled with sudden perception of what he

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had neglected. He had *not* pondered enough on the engineering of the contract. He had been too much absorbed in the actual excavation, the difficulties of supply and the troubles with Hebden and about money. He had never reckoned that Loon Lake would probably rise in November, but had thought of the hay-land as flooded in spring only. He now experienced that dreadful daze of the mind which comes when one suddenly understands that he has overlooked a fatal danger that was "right under his eyes," as it were.

A rise of nine feet in Loon Lake would, he knew, send a thin stream of water down the bed of the creek in which his men were excavating. A rise of one foot would bring the surface of the water as high as the bottom of his excavation, though it would be then held far back by the very rock he meant to take out.

It was now clear that he would need a dam across the creek up near the lake, in case it rose more than one foot. He would need this dam to keep water off the shoaling upper end of the deep rock he meant to excavate. The men could not drill and blast in water. And if they

should not get out all the rock upon the first of January, his father and mother would be utterly ruined, and deeply in debt.

The outlet creek, in which he was excavating, ran like a deep gash through the clay of the hay-land for half a mile. Its head connected with the lake by a sort of bay two hundred yards long. The upper end of the eight-feet-deep excavation would stop about half-way up this bay, which was a hundred and forty yards wide at that point. Therefore he must build a dam one hundred and forty yards long, and high enough to hold back any probable rise of the lake in November and December.

Now Walter saw very clearly that the enormous price his father was getting for the deeper excavation had been intended to cover the cost of the dam and the risk that it might be carried away.

With bitter regret he reflected that he might have erected the dam on dry land or rock if he had foreseen the need. Could he do so now, after three days' rain? Taking Sam with him, he went up the creek, and found that the water had already risen three feet in the deep depres-

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sion of the lake and outlet bay. The hay-land was still unflooded, but he must build his dam in two feet of water. How high it must be he could not tell, for he had never questioned any one as to the rise of the lake in autumn.

Walter, though feeling almost at his wits' end, explained the situation to Sam.

"It will take a good many men to run up the dam," said Walter. "I can't take a man off the job. These navvies don't know how to build a dam, anyhow. It's mighty little I know myself. I guess the best plan will be to rig up a lot of stout three-legged trestles, give 'em a slope to the front as lumbermen do and plank them."

"But plank won't hold back water," said Sam. "It would leak through the cracks."

"Yes, plank alone wouldn't do. But we can fill clay in front. Or, say, we can fill in the front with hay, and throw mud in front of that. Hay? Why, I guess that's what Jaffray was thinking of!"

But straightway he reflected to himself, "Surely Jaffray would have warned me if he'd seen I needed a dam."

The truth was that Jaffray had never really

given his mind to the engineering effect of the deepening of the excavation. There were some things, he admitted later, which even his experience had not taught him. The use to which he designed to put the fact that the marsh grew vast quantities of wild hay was quite unconnected with dams.

"Well, Walt, I guess it will be all right," said Sam, soothingly. "You can build the dam. I can see myself that your plan will work. All I've got to say is, go at it. There's no time to be lost."

"I'm afraid time enough has been lost already to knock the profits off the job," said Walter. "But I'll go straight to the Carry, and try to get men together. The worst of it is that the river-men are mostly gone to the woods already, or on their way. Oh Sam, I've been working under a terrible blunder."

"Well, who could have thought it? It's queer father never mentioned the dam to you."

"Only when he was delirious. Don't you remember, Sam? I thought it was the Buckstone Bridge dam he was crying out about when he was so ill. I guess he never really expected

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he would go deeper than four feet, and so he didn't talk about the dam to me. My, I've been an awful fool!"

"Never mind, Walt. Pile in; it will come all right. We've got to finish the job somehow. Let's get a big gang together right away."

But Walter did not reply. A long silence fell on him. He sat down on the still dry bed of the creek and looked more than ever desperate. When he spoke it was to say:—

"Sam—more men—fifty, perhaps! Perhaps for a week or more. And more rain may come any day. The expenses may be heavy. The dam may be very hard to build if the water rises fast, and all the money spent on it may be wasted. And at whose risk? Who's advancing our money?"

"Mr. Geminill, of course," said Sam. "What then? Don't be bothering him!"

"Why, I must tell him about this. He may not approve. I dare not put him in deeper without explaining."

To confess that, after all, he had misrepresented affairs to the banker! To confess that he had been ignorant, unforeseeing, rash, neg-

lectful! To confess that this great trouble arose from his blind undertaking of the deep excavation! Surely it would destroy Mr. Gemmill's confidence in him. Could it be believed that the banker would risk more money in his hands? And if he did not — if he required an immediate abandonment of the work — what then? The sick father and the dear, hopeful mother would be utterly ruined and heavily in debt!

"But why should you be in a hurry to tell Mr. Gemmill?" asked Sam, unconsciously expressing the very temptation that was tearing at Walter's sense of honor. "The lake mayn't rise more. Get a big gang together and pile in."

Walter reflected again in silence. Why give up, why confess before trying what he could do? Was it wise to alarm the banker? Mr. Gemmill might take a more gloomy view than the risks warranted. He might stop the work, whereas boldness might pull it through.

Yet the still small voice kept up the struggle. It whispered very clearly, "Mr. Gemmill trusted you. You are in duty bound to tell him of this at once. He should have the choice of withdrawing or going on."

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"That's all nonsense," said Sam, angrily, when Walter again spoke his mind. "What's the use of scaring Mr. Gemrill out? You haven't tried anything yet. Who knows but you can get men right away? Don't funk this way, Walter."

"I don't think I'm funking, Sam. I'm trying to see what's right, and sensible too. It's a new case. I'm in a great difficulty. I've got Mr. Gemmill in with me; he thinks it's all plain sailing; what would he have a right to think if I should bring the contract to a greater loss than can be incurred by stopping now, and had never told him I was in this fix?"

"But you don't know you are really in a bad fix. It may be easy to put up all the dam that's needed. Inquire. And above all, don't waste time. Why, you might put Mr. Gemmill beyond all risks by piling in on the dam to-morrow."

This was the consideration that battled most strongly against Walter's prompting to inform his backer. By energy he might still save the contract and make a profit. He might thus be acting in Mr. Gemmill's best interest. But by

telling him the danger he might frighten the banker into choosing to bear the losses that immediate stoppage would involve, rather than boldly taking a new risk that might bring him out with a profit.

The humiliation of telling the case to his backer seemed harder the more he thought of it. Could he not avoid that?

He took out his note-book and tried to estimate the losses to come of stopping now. He estimated, too, the far greater losses to come of going on, building the dam, and after all failing to complete the job in the contract time. And the greater the danger of loss, the greater his obligation to inform the banker!

It was a hard quandary for a youth whose disposition, like Sam's, was all for action, all for grappling with the difficulty and the risks. At last Walter thought of a middle course. He might go to the Carry at once and see if men were to be had. He would consult any of them who understood the building of dams, as nearly all river-men do. Then he would be able to decide whether the magnitude of the enterprise required the disclosure to Mr. Gemmill.

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As Walter almost resolved on this course he felt pricked in conscience. It did not seem perfectly frank to Mr. Gemmill. But he told Sam what he intended.

"That's right," said Sam. "What's the use of bothering Mr. Gemmill? Keep dark and do the best you can."

Keep dark! At the words Walter's soul rose in revolt. Keep dark! Conceal the truth from his benefactor! Play the sneak to him! Sam had hit the bull's-eye of Walter's honor. But he did not rebuke Sam. He wanted no more talk, no more temptation.

"Sam, I won't keep it dark. I will at once write the precise truth to Mr. Gemmill. If he can't trust me any longer so much the worse for me. Anyhow, I'll do all I can to deserve to be trusted."

"And you won't be. And the job will be stopped. And father will be ruined. You're a fool, Walt," said Sam.

"Don't let us quarrel, Sam," said Walter, holding out his hand. "I've got enough to worry through without that. You wouldn't have me go against my conscience."

"Only I wish you hadn't that kind of girly-girly conscience — that's all," said Sam, looking still vexed, though he was secretly glad of the strong grasp of Walter's hand.

Walter drove at once to Elbow Carry, that he might catch the afternoon mail. He felt disinclined to tell Jaffray at once about the need for a dam. It was a matter so much for Mr. Gemmill's decision that the young boss resolved to disclose nothing of his difficulty to the tavern-keeper until he should have received the banker's reply. It was not till he had written and posted his plain statement that he went to the landlord of the "Royal Arms."

"I've been thinking of increasing my force again," said Walter. "Do you suppose I can get a gang of river-men together quickly if I want them for a few days?"

"No, sir, you can't," said Jaffray, holding his eyes firmly together. "Peter Black has hired every man in sight. He's coming up to-morrow himself, and he's had two agents here these three days. They've got a hundred men together, and he's expecting to bring another hundred from Garroch and thereabout. You'll

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have to pay big money to get men for any short job. Peter Black's hiring 'em for all winter."

The Carry seemed overrun with shantymen, but on going among them Walter found Jaffray's report true. They were mostly "going up" for Peter Black, a very enterprising young lumberman.

Walter felt dismay creeping more and more deeply into his heart. Even if Mr. Gemmill should consent to the building of the dam it was doubtful if men enough could be assembled to do it speedily. Nothing but very high pay would hold them even one week from going to the backwoods for the winter.

Walter felt that Mr. Gemmill ought to know this, too. So, about the middle of the afternoon, he telegraphed these words to the banker:

"In reference to my letter posted this forenoon, I find river-men will be hard to get and must be paid about double wages for a short job."

The young boss now felt that he had done all he could to inform his backer fully. On that point his conscience became easy. The effect was to set him thinking calmly about

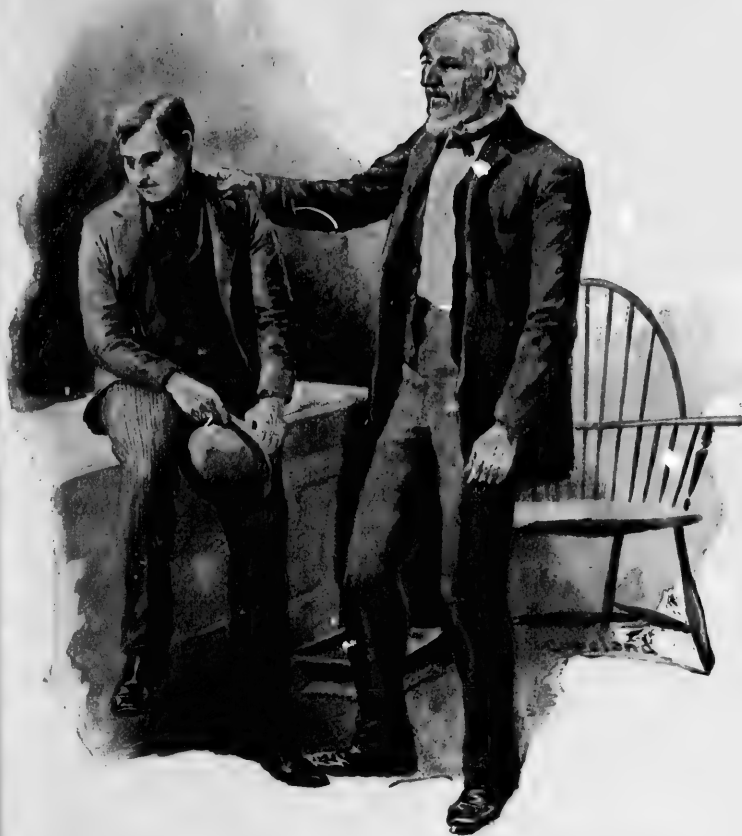
what he should do in case the banker should tell him to go on with the dam.

He soon saw that he should need no manufactured material for the work if it were built on the plan he had sketched in talk with Sam, except about three thousand superficial feet of three-inch plank, and some kegs of heavy spikes for the three-legged trestles. Hay, mud, and light timber for the trestles he could obtain close by the dam site. Walter quickly found that he could buy the plank at a saw-mill, and the spikes at one of the stores.

The next question was as to getting these materials quickly to the dam site in case of Mr. Gemmill's consent. Had Jaffray plenty of wagons and teams likely to be disengaged for the morrow? With this question he went to the tavern-keeper.

"No," said Jaffray. "You know I haven't got a great bunch of horses on hand at this season. When the time for teaming men that drive the river has passed I sell off some horses and send more to the woods. And every team I've got is engaged for to-morrow and three days after, to take Peter Black's men and sup-

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said Jaffray.

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"That's bad," said Walter, gloomily, for insurmountable difficulties seemed to arise on every hand.

"What were you wanting teams for anyhow, young man?"

"It's possible I may have to build a dam, sir," said Walter, thinking it best to explain to some extent.

Now a hint was as good as a long story to the shrewd tavern-keeper. Before his mind's eye the map of Loon Lake, its hay-lands and its outlet creek suddenly spread.

"Thunder and lightning!" he cried, as if aghast. "I tee-totally forgot you'd need a dam. But of course you will—on account of going so deep with the excavation! Jerusha, here's a pickle! There'll be six feet of water to fight. Why didn't you get at this before?"

"I never thought of it at all, Mr. Jaffray," said Walter, wofully. "Seems as if I had been stone-blind."

"Don't get scared, son. A man can't think when he's scared," said Jaffray, kindly, laying

his hand on Walter's shoulder. "Come into my back room and tell me just how things stand."

While the young boss explained the situation and all his proceedings, Jaffray sat winking furiously. He closed his eyes at the conclusion of the story for fully five minutes, and was deeply buried in thought. Finally he remarked decisively:—

"I'm going to try if I can pull your chestnuts out of the fire, or water rather. Certainly they're in it pretty deep. No men to be had—water rising—why, if there's more rain soon there may be a stream over your work before you can say Jack Robinson. I guess you'll have to drop this job right away."

"That's ruin," said Walter.

"Oh, I guess not," smiled Jaffray, with much winking. "But I ought to have had more time to work on Hebden's mind. I was reckoning to stop you about the middle of December."

"What do you mean, Mr. Jaffray? You've hinted at this before, but I never could understand your meaning."

"I mean that Hebden went into that contract

like a blind man. He's a kind of crank, and green as grass anyhow. He hadn't been here a month, he hadn't examined the contracts that his dead uncle made, he didn't know what obligations he inherited with his estate. He got it into his head that he'd do wonders by draining that hay-land, and before I'd heard anything about it he made the contract with your father. Now I'm going to remind Mr. Hebden of the existence of Windy Jim."

CHAPTER VII.

PETER BLACK'S PLAN.

DURING the recent weeks of Walter's work at Loon Lake Mr. Hebden had been concealing with difficulty his delight in a prospect he foresaw. He knew, for Walter's father had fully explained to him, the necessity for a dam in case the deep work were undertaken. As Walter let week after week pass without setting about the dam the litigious, ill-tempered little pettifogger reckoned with glee that the young boss must come to disaster. His malicious disposition was particularly pleased by the three days' rain.

"The next estimate will be due on the fifth of December," his secret thoughts ran. "By that time the need for a dam will be plain. I will not pay the estimate. I will object that the dam has not been built, and that the work

cannot be finished in contract time. He will, of course, stop the job. I shall claim forfeit and bring suit for damages. Even if old man Gibbs is bankrupt, I shall have all his son's work during November to the good, and I can finish the job cheap next year with that start to the good."

Of late Hebden had been keeping himself closely informed of Walter's movements. When he learned that the young boss had been inquiring for lumber and spikes he pondered the situation carefully. Plainly Walter was about to try to build the dam.

But could he obtain a big gang of river-men speedily enough to deal successfully with the rising water? Putting this question to himself, Hebden ordered his foreman to compete with Peter Black, and employ at once all the shanty-men seeking work for the winter.

On the following morning the little man was in a state of high satisfaction. The weather looked cloudy. More rain was in prospect. The dam must be built immediately or not at all, and his foreman told him that no men were to be had at Elbow Carry for any wages.

"Now we'll see," said Hebden, turning to

his morning mail. That son of Gibbs' shall learn a lesson that will last him the rest of his life."

At that moment Mr. Hebden opened a letter directed in the large round hand of Jaffray, the hotel-keeper.

Never did a face grow more red and wrathful than his became as he perused the notification. At a second reading he slapped it down on his desk, struck it with his clenched fist, and sat staring at it as if he expected it might vanish into nothingness under his dreadful gaze. As it did nothing of the kind, he collected his wits, rose, unlocked the door of his dead uncle's bricked-in safe, and after much rummaging brought forth a form of agreement, which he proceeded to read with positive fury. It was the document to which Mr. Jaffray referred in this letter:—

HOWARD HEBDEN, Esq.,

"DEAR SIR,— You are, I understand, about to lower Loon Lake and drain the hay-lands there. I hereby notify you that your uncle, the late John Hebden, for value received, bound himself, his heirs, and assigns to give me the cutting of five hundred acres of wild hay per year on those lands. The contract has still two years to

run, and I mean to hold you to its fulfillment. You perhaps don't know that the land if drained will cease to produce wild hay.

"I may also take the liberty of telling you that it will produce no other crop for a good many years, as the land will be too sour.

"Yours truly,

"JAMES JAFFRAY, 'Royal Arms' Hotel.

"Sometimes called 'Windy Jim.'"

"I couldn't help getting that in," said Jaffray to Walter at a later day. "Of course it was bad business — but the old Nick got into me. I wanted to give him the reminder of how he'd insulted me."

Mr. Hebden sat clenching his hands with fury. He was not chastened, but only maddened the more as his own reflections taunted him.

This little man was the proverbial beggar put suddenly on horseback. His inheritance of the Hebden estate had been quite unexpected by him. Coming from his pettifogging practice into a large fortune in Canada, his head, as the lumberman said, had "swelled."

He had felt and acted for four months like an autocrat. He had discharged some of his uncle's

confidential men; others had rebelled against his bullying manner and left him; those who had remained had soon abstained from counselling an employer who took every bit of advice as an imputation against his wisdom.

He now saw that many men about him must have understood that his plan of drainage would destroy a valuable tract of hay-land, for he did not doubt Jaffray's word. The wild hay was always worth at least ten dollars a ton. His own lumber shanties needed vast quantities. And he had been imagining that the land would continue to yield the crop till he could put it in timothy or sell it for farms!

He reflected, angrily, that Jaffray must have been laughing at him for weeks, and meditating this notification. He reflected with still more anger that the old confidential manager who had quickly left him with disgust must have known of this agreement, and would have warned him of its provisions had his services been retained.

Still Hebden did not abandon his hope to punish Walter Gibbs. Reverting to that matter he saw more clearly than ever that the young

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boss could not drain the land according to contract unless he could at once assemble a large force of men capable of building a dam.

"If that boy fails," thought Hebden, "the meadows will stay as they are, and this contract with Jaffray will not be infringed in the least."

He therefore sent no reply to the tavern-keeper. Time enough to reckon with him in case there should be a prospect of the completion of the drainage job that fall. Meantime Walter, who had stayed all night at the "Royal Arms" in order to receive as early as possible in the forenoon the despatch which he expected from Mr. Gemmill, was quite unaware of Jaffray's interference in the business.

The young boss had slept wretchedly; nightmares carrying his father and mother to destruction galloped through his short dreams. He rose miserable, breakfasted without appetite, and walked out in the dull weather among the crowds of men all waiting for the arrival of Peter Black. It seemed cruel to the young boss that all these hands, able at dam-building, should be going far out of his reach just when he might most need their aid.

Nine o'clock came. "Now," thought Walter, "Mr. Gemmill will be reading my letter. By ten I shall get a despatch from him. But what if he does say, 'Go ahead with the dam'? Where shall I get men?"

At quarter to ten he went to the little telegraph office. No despatch! At eleven the tale was the same. So at half-past eleven. Walter was in a woe of anxiety. Was Mr. Gemmill so staggered that he could not make up his mind in any sense? Eighty men clanking away on the Loon Lake work! If they were to be stopped it would be as well to stop them quickly, for every day on the work would in that case mean heavier loss to his father.

As Walter came out of the telegraph office at half-past eleven he heard the whistle of the steamboat coming up the river. It was barely possible that Mr. Gemmill might have sent up a letter by the boat.

"He might," thought Walter, "have wondered at my telegram of yesterday afternoon, and gone to the post-office late in the evening to get my letter, which would not otherwise reach him till this morning."

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Walter walked rapidly toward the wharf. In came the steamboat fairly black with men. They were roaring the French-Canadian chorus of "*O roulant ma boule.*" The crowd waiting for them caught up and sang the inspiring refrain.

"All river-men, nearly," thought Walter. "Good gracious, if I could have them for a few days! Wouldn't two hundred of them just rattle up that dam!"

On the hurricane-deck beside the captain stood a tall young man, who had become a very familiar figure on the river. When the men ashore saw his keen, shaven face clearly they stopped singing, and soon the chorus ceased from the steamboat also.

One of the men on the wharf shouted, "Who yer goin' up for?"

"Peter Black!" roared a hundred voices together. It was the favorite "gag" of the river when Peter Black first became the pre-eminent adventurer in the hazardous lumber trade.

Peter Black, standing beside the captain, laughed heartily. When something like silence

fell just as the boat touched the wharf, he came to the side and held up his hand for attention.

"Is Walter Gibbs of Garroch there?" he then cried.

"Yes, sir, I'm here," cried the young boss.

"Come aboard, will you? I've got a word for you. Make way there, men — let Mr. Gibbs aboard."

Walter ran up the gangway, climbed to the hurricane-deck, and clasped hands with the great lumberman.

"What is it, sir?" he said, "have you a letter for me from Mr. Gemmill?"

"No. But I've seen him. I had business with him last night, and was stopping at his house. He says go ahead with your dam."

Walter stood dumb. He scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry. For the thought of the lack of men struck him with new force, now that he must look for hands.

"Mr. Gemmill told me your fix," said Black. "He was greatly pleased with your straightforward letter. So was I — he read it to me. Now I've been in such scrapes myself, and I know it's tough to own up to one's backer.

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Well, the long and short of it is, you can have all the men you want. Here's two hundred of mine at your disposal. It was lucky I chanced to hear of your fix."

"What! You'll lend me a gang?"

"Yes, and I'll go down and run up that dam for you myself. I've built a dozen big dams in my time."

"Well — Mr. Black — I don't know how to thank you!"

"Don't thank me — thank your honest letter, Mr. Gibbs. I'll lose nothing. You'll pay the men for their time. I don't really want 'em up river yet for a week. Jaffray!" he shouted, seeing the tavern-keeper coming across the wharf, "I want you to move a hundred men down to Mr. Gibbs' contract after they've got their dinner — can you do it?"

"Of course I can," cried Jaffray, "but —" he stopped and stood winking as if puzzled. He was thinking that he had been too hasty in notifying Hebden, for now he saw that Walter might finish the contract after all.

It was half-past two o'clock the same afternoon before all preparations had been completed

for taking one hundred river-men to Loon Lake. Tents, pork, biscuit, tea, axes, every foreseen requisite for their dam-building had been brought from Peter Black's storehouse near the wharf.

Nine wagons, each containing eleven men and one of Jaffray's drivers, stood ranged before the "Royal Arms" Hotel. Four other wagons were piled high with supplies. Everything had been made ready for Peter Black's order to start, but neither Peter, nor Jaffray, nor Walter was to be seen.

The cause of this delay was I Black himself. Scarcely had he landed from the steamboat before he had learned from Jaffray the true situation of the Loon Lake job.

Up to that time the young lumberman had been unaware that Hebden's scheme of drainage applied to a great tract of wild hay.

"And you tell me, Jaffray, that you want Hebden to go on paying for worse than worthless work," said Peter, sternly. "'Pon my word, it's too bad. Somebody should have told Mr. Hebden plainly that his plan will destroy those valuable meadows."

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"Oh, he's one of the kind that knows it all," said Jaffray. "He's got the 'big head,' don't you see. I want him to learn a lesson. He contracted for this drainage job on his own cranky notions; he gets mad when anybody gives him a word of advice, and he's acted as mean as dirt to young Gibbs. I'd be glad to see it cost him any amount."

"You're too vindictive, friend Jaffray," said Peter. "It's true Hebden is a greenhorn and an arrogant, offensive greenhorn at that. But it's a shame to let him throw away his money for want of a word of warning. If he won't take warning — why, then, there's no helping him. For me, I hate to see men's work wasted no matter who's to pay for it. I'm going over to see Hebden about this."

"Why, what do you expect you can do with him?" asked Jaffray, sulkily.

"What he should do is clear," said Peter. "He should pay for the work already done, and pay Gibbs for abandoning the profits he could probably make by completing the job. Surely he will have sense enough to see that after getting your letter."

But Peter Black found Mr. Hebden in no humor for compromise. The little man, quite unaware that Peter would put up the dam for Walter, jumped to the idea that the young lumberman had come to him on Walter's behalf.

"You tell me, Mr. Black," said Hebden, "that the hay-land will be ruined by drainage. I am obliged to you for the information. It may be correct. If so, all I have to do is to dam up this outlet and flood the land again. Then I shall have to pay no damages to Jaffray on his hay contract with my uncle."

"All right, if you will have it so," said Black, patiently. "You will then pay the useless removal of about twelve or thirteen thousand cubic yards of rock. If you could induce Gibbs to stop now you'd have to pay for only four or five thousand yards, and the allowance for profits on the rest."

"Induce Gibbs to stop!" snorted Hebden. "I fancy the rising lake will do that. Pooh-pooh, sir, I shall deal as I please with Gibbs!"

"That's your calculation, eh?" said Black. "Then I may tell you that the water won't stop the young fellow at all."

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"Pooh—he can't find men to build his dam," cried Hebden.

"Pooh yourself, sir, he's found them already! I'm going to lend him a hundred, or two hundred if they can be used. I'm going to build the dam for him myself. My men are in wagons now, waiting to go down there."

"The way you infernal colonials hang together!" cried Hebden, angrily.

"Well, now, Mr. Hebden, I don't think your tone is quite justified," said the wise young lumberman, soothingly. "It's in your own interest that I took the liberty of suggesting a course. It doesn't seem to me judicious to throw good money after bad. It is very easy for me to understand that a gentleman recently from England should not see the value of wild hay, for 'at home' it would be useless, I presume. There you'd naturally want to drain such a marsh and get a crop from it. But wild hay represents good money in a rough, lumbering country. No newcomer could know that."

"I wish some one had had the decency to tell me of this in time," said Hebden, somewhat mollified.

"Well, sir, I thought it was my duty to come as soon as I understood the situation. I hope I've given you no offence."

The considerate and respectful tone of the well-known and wealthy young lumberman was like balm to the wounded and angry little man.

"Won't you sit down again, Mr. Black?" he said. "I'm really very much obliged to you. What do you propose? If young Gibbs has your men at his command I presume there's no doubt he can put up the dam and finish the contract."

"Very little," said Black. "Of course the dam might give him some trouble. But he's a bright, active young fellow, and could probably keep it in repair. I presume you don't really wish him to come to grief—it would be a sad thing for his father to lose his all on this contract. Really, I think it would be a Christian thing for you to relieve him from the risk, and save a good many thousands of your own money in the bargain."

"Well, well—putting it on that ground," said Hebden, feeling somewhat puffed up at

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the assumption that he was in a position to make generous concessions. "What does he propose?"

"I haven't consulted him in the matter yet," said Black. "But I dare say he will hear reason. Suppose we send for him."

So Walter, to his amazement, was confronted with a proposal that he should stop work at once. At first he rebelled decidedly.

"I don't see why I should," said he, for he had been very ambitious to finish the job cleanly, and greatly lifted up by the prospect which Black's men gave him.

"I think you should," said Black. "Mr. Hebden agrees, I understand, to pay the whole outlay and allow for a reasonable profit. Let us figure on the thing," and once he got Walter involved in calculations the bargain was in a fair way toward conclusion.

Jaffray, being called in to give his opinion as to the cost of supplying Walter's men for six weeks longer, soon became engaged in the general discussion, and cleverly addressed himself to increasing the allowance that Walter should receive for prospective profits.

Still the young boss was discontented with the idea of giving up the work.

"I might make half as much again as you advise me to take," he said, drawing Mr. Black aside.

"You might and you mightn't. The dam might break away, and more than once. Deep snow may come early. Rain may rob you of half the working days from this out. Take a good profit when you can get it. And another point is this—consider how greatly relieved from anxiety your mother and father will be if you close out the job now with a good profit on hand."

"That's so, you're giving me good advice," said Walter, gratefully. "But I'll have to get Mr. Gemmill's opinion on the matter."

At four o'clock that afternoon Peter Black's men were told that they could proceed with their supplies, not to Loon Lake, but to the head of the Carry. At half-past four Walter had begun to exchange telegrams with Mr. Gemmill. At six o'clock the banker had sent his final word. "Take Peter Black's advice. Let him see that the settlement is secure.

Four thousand dollars' profit over all is a good transaction, and I congratulate you and myself on being out of the job."

Thus it happened that Walter Gibbs, Senior, when his interest in business revived, was cheered by the news that four thousand dollars stood to his credit in Mr. Gemmill's bank. It lifted up his heart so greatly that he recovered speedily, and was back in Garroch before Christmas. The looks and words of gratitude and love that the young boss then received from his parents he can never forget.

"My dear boy, you did wonders," said his father, "wonders. In less than two months, four thousand dolliars! Why, it was a grand business."

"Aye, Wally'll make a good business man yet, I'm thinkin'," said Mr. Gemmill, patting his protégé affectionately on the arm. "He just did fine, and I give ye notice I'll back him again if he's needing it."

"Well, sir," said Walter, blushing, "it seems to me that I don't deserve one bit of credit. You started me. Mr. Jaffray saved the forfeit for me. Sam kept the gang together by cook-

ing at a pinch, and Mr. Black got me out of the final scrape with a profit. It seems to me I didn't come in anywhere—I didn't even finish the job."

"Well, I'm no saying but you had some good turns done ye," said Mr. Gemmill. "But mind you this—it's the man with a head on him, and sense and manners, that gets good turns done him in this world—aye, is it! And you'll not forget that you downed Meigs all by your lone, and skelpit yon Prussian, besides all the work of administrating the job. Oh, I'll back ye again to ony reasonable extent. I'm aye for backin' business lads that has streaks of luck coming quick after others. That means ability—luck's but a foolish name for the good turns that's aye happenin' to them that help theirsels."

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TOM'S FEARFUL ADVENTURE.

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TOM'S FEARFUL ADVENTURE.

"I'm going with Doug to play tennis, mother."

"Where is Douglas, Tommy?"

"Down-stairs in the drawing-room. He's waiting for me."

"Well, dear, I suppose you can go," said Mrs. Leamington, turning around from her sewing-machine. "But don't you think you should wash your face first?"

"Is it very dirty, mother?"

"Fearfully — for a fellow of fourteen."

"All right. I'll just go into the bath-room as I pass. Well, good-bye! What? you won't kiss me, mother?"

"I can't kiss a big boy with a dirty face."

"Oh, I forgot. I beg your pardon, mother. You *will* kiss me good-bye, though?"

"After you come from the bath-room."

"*All* right, mother dear."

Away went Tom into the bath-room. He was his mother's only child, and she was a widow. Tom was taller than the little woman in black, and was accustomed to pet her as elaborately as she petted him.

Mrs. Leamington had reluctantly given in to Tom's opinion that his coats and trousers should be made by a tailor, but could not deny herself the satisfaction of making his shirts. She was now sewing on one in her bedroom, next door to the bath-room.

Whirr-r-r-r went the sewing-machine; *whirr-r-r* — it was a long seam; *whirr-r-r* — it stopped.

Mrs. Leamington lifted the needle-bar, pulled the edge loose, snipped off the thread, adjusted another seam, and was about to start sewing again, when several small objects in the bath-room fell to the floor.

"What have you knocked down, Tommy?"

No answer.

The water was still pouring from the tap, not steadily. It sounded as though partly stopped at times.

Whirr-r. Mrs. Leamington began another seam. At that moment she thought she heard

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other small things clatter in the bath-room; but the seam was well started, and she rattled on.

Tom was stamping and kicking. The whirl was not so loud but that she could hear his feet. He seemed to be kicking the base-board and stamping on the floor, not with all his force.

"*Such* a noisy fellow!" cried the widow, bringing her seam to a finish.

No answer came from Tom.

"What on earth are you at, Tommy?" said Mrs. Leamington with some vexation.

No answer from Tom. His mother, somewhat puzzled, was about to rise and go to him when she heard him rapping.

Rap — rap — rap — rap — a pause — rap — rap — rap.

"Tommy! You *noisy* fellow."

Tom did not reply, but rapped once more; four raps — a pause — three raps.

She rose impatiently to go to him.

But at that moment Tom's chum, Douglas Maclean, sprang up-stairs three steps at a time.

"Where's Tom, Mrs. Leamington?" he cried, in a voice of alarm as he reached the landing.

"In the bath-room, Douglas."

Douglas dashed into the open bath-room door. Mrs. Leamington sat down to her machine.

"What's the matter, Tom?" cried Douglas in surprise, but no longer in alarm.

No answer from Tom.

"What did you fool me for?" said Douglas.

Still no reply from Tom. Mrs. Leamington thought his silence very strange. He was again stamping and kicking.

"What! Can't you lift up your head, Tom?" cried Douglas, in a terrified tone, that brought the widow instantly to her feet.

At that instant there was a sound of something breathing in the bath-room. Then Tom spoke with gasps.

"Doug! Ah — oh my — Doug — ah — I was nearly gone — ah — where's mother? Mother!" he cried, tumbling, with wet face and streaming hair, into her room.

"Oh, mother, I've had such a fearful adventure!" he said, throwing his arms round her and shuddering.

"What is it, Tommy?"

"Oh, I was so afraid you'd come in and find me dead — and it would kill you!"



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"Why, Tom! How could you have had a fearful adventure? It's not more than two minutes since you left me."

"It seems — I don't know how long, mother. I was nearly drowned. If Douglas hadn't understood the raps, I should have been dead."

"Lucky we fixed up that signal," said Douglas, standing in the doorway.

"Don't stay, Doug. I want to tell mother alone. Please go and wait for me down-stairs. I'll tell you when I come." Douglas departed.

"Mother, I was almost drowned," repeated Tom.

"Why, Tom, dear, what are you talking about?"

"I got my head stuck in the wash-basin! The taps caught in the back of my head when I tried to lift it. And the basin was full of water."

"But how could you have got your head between those two taps?"

"I don't know. I've often tried to before. But this time I gave a plunge—and down I went. You know how those taps stick out to the middle of the basin—I never thought about being caught. They must have sprung

to let my head through—I know they hurt a little. Then when I tried to lift my head up, I couldn't."

"Tommy, *dear*, how dreadful!"

"I tried to push my head up, but it was no use. The taps hurt me. I twisted my head first to one side, then to the other—it was no go. I pushed my head forward to the back of the basin, and could *not* get it up. I pulled my chin against the front of the basin—it was no use; I could not get up.

"Then I jerked and jerked. The taps hurt me fearfully, mother. And the more I jerked the more I seemed to be stuck."

"Poor Tom! If you had called me!" said the mother, patting the hand of her still trembling boy.

"Mother! I couldn't call with the back of my head, could I? You forget my mouth and nose were deep in the water. It was fearful to know you were so close and I couldn't call you. You heard me knock down the tooth-powder and tooth-brushes, didn't you?"

"Yes, dear, and I called to you."

"I upset them with my hands, you know,

hoping you would come. And I heard you speak then. When I screwed my head one side down, the other ear was out of water. Oh, I'd have given anything to be able to speak! It seemed as if I *couldn't* hold my breath in any more.

"I tried to pull the taps apart with my hands, but somehow I didn't seem to have any strength, stooping the way I was. I got my hands on the taps but couldn't budge them. Then I was *sure* I was going to drown.

"I tried to reach down past my face with my right hand to pull the plug out and let the basin empty, but I couldn't reach the plug. Then I tried to stop the water running in, but I was in such pain that I didn't seem able to do anything. I suffered so! It made me stamp and kick.

"Then I began to stamp and kick on purpose. And you said, 'Such a noisy boy!' Oh, mother, I wanted to cry! It seemed so *awful* to be drowning, and you sort of laughing at me in the next room."

"Tommy, *darling*! You'll make me cry."

"Well, it was just awful, mother dear. It

was frightful—you talking to me that nice way, as if you couldn't scold me, and me drowning. I was sure I was dying. And it just *killed* me to think how you'd go white and pale, and look with big eyes, and faint dead away, and die, too, when you came in and found me stuck there, dead!

"You'd think I was fooling at first, you know, mother; and you'd stand and smile! And then you'd begin to wonder a little; and you'd come up and put your hand on my shoulder and say, 'Tom, dear,' and I'd be dead!"

"Tommy, dear son! It's fearful. Poor darling, how you must have suffered!"

"Suffered! Why, mother, I died! I thought I was dead, and that's what saved me. I began thinking about being dead, and I remembered the seven raps, and Douglas in the drawing-room."

"The seven raps?"

"Yes, it's a signal—it's a signal that Doug and I and the fellows have in case—in case—but I can't tell you, mother, only you know if you *were* in a dungeon and the fellows were looking for you, why, a signal would be very useful."

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"I understand, Tom," said the little widow, who had pieced together many incautious references of Tom's to the Seven Silent Shadows Society, of which her boy and Doug were important members.

"Well, you understand, mother, I rapped as hard as I could on the boarding underneath the marble top of the basin. But I didn't think Doug would hear me. I couldn't hear the raps myself, for there was such a roaring in my ears. It wasn't the water pouring that roared, I think it must have been the blood in my head — the whole world seemed roaring away from me — and how I wanted to hear the raps!

"But I could only feel my knuckles going. I struck as hard as I could — *one, two, three, four* — that means — but I forgot, I mustn't tell, that's a secret, mother. And I couldn't hear a thing.

"I thought I could see Douglas sitting down on the blue ottoman twirling his racket and waiting. I was sure he hadn't heard me. And I didn't think I could rap again, but I tried. After that I didn't know anything till Douglas pulled me up."

"How did he get your head loose, dear?"

"Why, he broke off both taps with one pull. Doug is terribly strong. Come and see, mother."

While Mrs. Leamington, with her big boy's arm round her neck, gazed at the broken faucets, she said: "But still I can't understand how Douglas knew."

"He understood the raps. You know the S. S. S. S., mother."

"Yes, and this, then, is the signal that a member is in danger of losing his life?"

As she spoke she rapped—four raps—a pause—three raps.

Douglas flew up-stairs.

"What! Who is in danger now?" cried Douglas.

"Mother was just rapping as I did," said Tom, with alarm in his countenance.

Mrs. Leamington laughed. "You'll have to make me a member, Douglas, now that I know your secrets."

"Thomas Leamington," said Douglas, in a sepulchral voice, "have you revealed aught?"

"Naught, Brother Douglas Maclean," responded Tom in the same deep tones.

"'Tis well," said Douglas.

"What are you two absurd boys at?" said Mrs. Leamington.

Tom and Douglas, with eyes rolled up till the whites showed, laid each his forefinger on his lips seven times.

"Inquire not into the sacred secrets of the Seven Silent Shadows, mother," said Tom, in the sepulchral voice.

Then in his natural tones, "Mother, now I'm going to play tennis. I may, mayn't I?"

"Yes, your face is quite clean. Take care of one another, boys. I'm afraid you are both a little cracked."

The two members of the Seven Silent Shadows Society rolled their eyes at her impressively, broke into laughter and ran, half-tumbling, down-stairs.

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NEVER did the pupils of the Academy of Mayfield, a Canadian school, watch a competition with more interest than they gave to that between George Digby and Etienne Seguin, for the gold medal, the hundred-dollars four-years' scholarship, and the proud title of "School Dux," all of which go each year to the boy of highest standing in the Seventh and highest Form. Even more than medal, scholarship, and title is earned by the winner. He carries from the academy such a reputation for character and ability as secures for him a warm welcome at the university, should he enter there, or a kindly reception in mercantile circles, should his be a business career. Having fairly established his title to consideration on the very threshold of practical life, the "School Dux"

starts with advantages far beyond those of inherited fortune.

George Digby, entering the academy as a small boy, had been head of each Form to the Seventh. A fair Second each year had been Ferdinand Vane, the only son of Mayfield's wealthiest merchant. By virtue of hard work and the steady good sense which always secured him the highest marks and conduct, George, with abilities less brilliant than Ferdinand's, surpassed him as far as Ferdinand did all others of the class.

The two boys entered the Seventh convinced that they would still maintain their relative positions to one another and the Form. But there they found a new competitor in Etienne Seguin.

At first the French boy was regarded with contemptuous curiosity by his classmates. There were many reasons for their attitude. He was a complete stranger to them, who had nearly all been together in the academy for six years. The admission of a new boy to the Seventh had not occurred before in their time. In such circumstances an English-Canadian boy would

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have been treated as an intruder, and Etienne was French-Canadian.

Now the academy is essentially an English-Canadian institution. Seldom does a French name appear on its class-lists. It is also Protestant, though not exclusively so, and Etienne was Catholic. His long hair, his dark eyes, his olive skin, his rapid utterance and impulsive gestures, proclaimed his race. Again, Etienne was evidently very poor, and nearly all the boys of the academy came from well-to-do families of professional or mercantile men.

Before the end of the first month the feeling against him in the academy had become positive and bitter. Questioned as to his reasons for joining, he had confidently mentioned his intention to become Dux!

"It's the hundred-dollar scholarship you have come for, of course!" cried Ferdinand, tauntingly.

"Yes, it is; I do want it very badly," said Etienne, simply, pointing to his seedy coat. The admission was fatal to his standing; it seemed wholly mercenary to the prosperous boys.

Etienne's work showed hard study at once. He soon arose in scholarship to within two marks of George, and had beaten Ferdinand by nine.

"Take the second place, Seguin," said the Principal, cordially. "You have done very well indeed. Digby, you are to have a close race for Dux, after all."

"Shake hands over it, Seguin," said George, as the French boy came to his side. "I'm going to keep you down if I can."

Etienne took the hand eagerly, looking gratefully into George's eyes. It was the first apparent kindness from a classmate.

"Thank you! thank you!" said he, with a thrill in his voice.

"What for?" was the roughly spoken answer. "Because I want to beat you?"

George hated a scene. He had offered his hand on somewhat the principle of the prize-ring—not that he liked his opponent, but that he wished to assure himself, and other people, that he entertained no feeling more malicious than a desire to beat him very thoroughly in accordance with the rules of

fair combat. Etienne dropped George's ' and turned to Ferdinand.

"Give him a shake, Ferd," advised George, in a soberly impartial tone; "he's got here fairly, you know."

But Ferdinand only scowled at his victor. The "Pea-Soup" — as he had nicknamed Etienne — to have taken his place! Hate flamed fierce in Ferdinand's heart.

Next month Etienne, more familiar with academy methods, took the first place. George, though sore-hearted, shook hands with him again in manly fashion and in real respect. The following month a cheer that could not be restrained broke out when George got his old place back. Etienne cheered, too, his voice high and clear above all, but somehow the boys could not give him the credit for good feeling which they would have given to such action in a lad of their own race.

"He cheered and sneered," said Ferdinand, at noon, and the rhyming epigram swept justice before it. Ferdinand was still third; he had distinctly lost rank, while George's was only threatened. And so the position remained till

the last month of the school-year, when little was talked of in the academy but the struggle for Dux.

Having passed and repassed each other frequently, George and Etienne stood equal in marks when June closed, and thereafter changed places from day to day as Head and Second.

"Come and have half an hour's Lacrosse, Seguin; I'm half dead for want of exercise," said George, with determined friendliness, after school that day.

"No, I'm not quite — what you say? — up to it," answered Etienne. "For three or four days I have not been very well. I will go home, I think."

"He daren't lose half an hour; he wants that hundred dollars a year too badly," sneered Ferdinand.

But when the game had begun Etienne came out as if to watch. The afternoon was intensely warm. Under a blazing sun the sandy playground glittered and burned. The players had thrown off their coats and waistcoats, near the north goal-posts, where all lay strewn together. Going to these, Etienne lay down at full length.

Ferdinand observing him, came hastily forward and, pulling out his garments with angry gestures, hung them on one goal-post.

"You can never tell what the Pea-Soup might be up to," he said, joining the game again.

"Gammon!" said George Digby. "What harm could he do your clothes? Your hatred for Seguin is making a regular crank of you, Ferdy."

"Never you mind," answered Ferdinand, with meaning which the other boys felt to be too profound for clear statement. They looked often suspiciously toward Etienne, when not taken up with the ball.

In a short time he was observed to rise, move languidly towards the building and disappear. Soon afterwards he came out and leaving the enclosure walked rapidly down the street.

"Off to his hole to study," said Ferdinand.

"Well, he's right enough. That's the way to hole us," answered George. "We'd better get to work — our half-hour must be up, anyway. Let us see," and going up to the pile of clothes, he took up his waistcoat to consult his watch.

"Why," cried he, in surprise, "my watch is gone!" He examined all the waistcoat's pockets, those of his coat, too, slapped his trouser-pockets, stood as if dazed, gazed at Ferdinand in mute inquiry. In Vane's face was a strange, wicked, triumphant expression.

"What do you mean?" asked George.

Vane, without speaking, stooped, lifted the garments one by one and threw them successively aside. The watch did not appear; his look of malign satisfaction became more remarkable.

"Here, you fellows!" cried he, "come and see how many of your watches have been taken."

"It can't be possible!" whispered George, realizing fully the Third boy's meaning.

"Can't it? We'll see. Now you may guess why I took my coat from under him," exulted Vane.

The boys who owned watches gazed at him. "Mine's here!" "Mine's here!" "Mine, too!" cried they, one after the other.

"All cheap ones—nickel mostly," answered Ferdinand, coolly. "George's and mine were

the only ones worth taking. Lucky for me I hung mine up on the post. There he goes!" he exclaimed.

The boys turned with his gesture. Etienne had not yet passed beyond the fence of the grounds. He was still walking rapidly. In one instant every boy present caught the suspicion, shouted "Seguin!" and rushed towards him in a body. George had tried to struggle against the conviction, but with the unanimous shout of his comrades the struggle ended. He joined the rush.

Etienne had stopped. The boys, nearing him, saw that he was deathly pale. They formed a ring about him. Ferdinand spoke first. "We've caught you!" he sneered.

"Well, what then?" asked Etienne, angrily.

"Oh, isn't he surprised? Of course *he* wouldn't take a watch!" cried Vane.

"What!"

"Oh, the impudence of him! Why don't you take your watch from him, George?" continued Vane.

Etienne turned to George. "What does this mean, George Digby?" he asked, sternly.

"My watch has been taken from my waistcoat since I took it off," George answered.

"And *you* were lying on it," put in Ferdinand. "Come, none of your nonsense! Shell out!"

"Do you dare to pretend that I would take a watch?" cried the French boy, furiously.

"Yes, that's just what I do mean!" answered Ferdinand.

"Stand back!" Etienne raised his heavy satchel threateningly. "Ha! I see! it's a conspiracy!" he went on, wildly. "You have laid a plot. Stand back! You would ruin me, then? Is it that you want a pretence to attack me? Ha! the examination is so near, I'm to be laid up, eh? I see!"

"Let us search him!" cried Ferdinand, and moved forward.

In an instant Etienne, with a burst of indignation and tears, brought his books with great force down on Vane's head, and knocked him sprawling into the gutter.

Leaping over his prostrate antagonist, he ran down the side street swiftly. A few boys started in pursuit.

"Let him go!" cried Ferdinand, rising. "He's done for. We'll have him up before 'Prof' to-morrow, and that's the end of Dux Pea-Soup!"

The boys wended their separate ways homeward, convinced of Seguin's guilt. It was just what they had expected, they remarked, after the fashion of their elders in such cases. George had no more doubt than the others; Seguin's conduct seemed to him full confirmation. He did not make a search of the ground, or the building, or his desk, for why should a French boy have fled had he not had the cash on him?

Next day there was not a doubt of Etienne's guilt in the academy, for he did not return. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, went by, and the French boy was still absent. Even the Principal no longer pretended to doubt the guilt of a lad who dared not face his accusers, though the coveted position of Dux was to be gained only through the examinations beginning the following Monday.

Though freed so strangely from his formidable competitor, George was not the boy to

relax his efforts. Working till late each night, spending Saturday in a steady grind, he rose on Sunday, after a sleepless night, in such a state of nervous excitement that his father insisted on taking him for a long walk, instead of to church. Having rambled far away into the country, and dined at a distant inn, George reached home fagged out, and after eating, went straight to bed and heavy slumber.

When he awoke, the sun was bright and high. Eight o'clock was striking. "Examinations! I'll be late!" and out he jumped. All aglow after his cold bath, he hastily began to dress. "Oral to-day. Parents and friends present. Sunday suit proper, I suppose," reflected he. On went the trousers. Now for the waistcoat. Reaching it from the closet hook, he threw it on, and in a twinkling buttoned it, standing before his tall mirror. And then into the mirror the boy stood staring, as if petrified with horror.

The mirror reflected his watch-guard, and putting up his hand, he drew forth the missing timepiece. The truth that he had forgotten to change the watch from his Sunday to his

school suit on the previous Monday flashed on him, together with the dreadful thought that he had falsely accused Etienne Seguin of theft.

George Digby was honest to the heart's core. He did not hesitate a moment. Etienne must be cleared at once, before the examination could begin. It was now twenty minutes after eight. George threw on his coat, seized his books, called to his mother that he could not wait for breakfast, and rushed out of the house. In five minutes he was inside the academy. There sat the Principal, preparing for the day's work.

"Where does Seguin live?" cried the breathless boy. While "Prof" turned up the address-book, George explained himself.

"But you have no time to find him," said the Principal. "It is nearly two miles away. You will miss the opening, and lose your place."

"I can't help it, sir. He must be found. I could not sit in class till the wrong is cleared away."

"Good boy! good fellow!" said "Prof." "But mind this," and he looked searchingly at George; "if you do bring him with you he will run you close for Dux."

"Then it would be infamous not to bring him!" said George.

George took a cab and soon found himself in a quarter where he had never been before. Instead of the spacious stone residences, shade-trees and flower gardens of the West End, here were long rows of decaying brick and wooden houses, little groceries, obscure saloons. Drag-gled women stood at the doors or gazed from the windows, ragged children watched him from the gutters, heavy and foul odors possessed the air.

He sickened to think of poor Etienne coming from such a quarter to compete gallantly for the great academy prize, and go down before a false charge. It did not occur to him that there must be other reason for Seguin's absence than the accusation, until a large yellow and black placard caught his attention. Another — another — how many! Printed on each, in huge black letters, were but two words: "PICOTTE — SMALL-POX."

He had forgotten the dread disease, which had recently begun to ravage the city. And now he was in the midst of it. This was the poor French quarter, its home! But he did not for

an instant think of turning back; his errand was of life and death importance to his own soul; only he wished he had not put off re-vaccination from day to day.

The cab stopped. George sprang out. There was the number. He ran up the steps and knocked loudly. As the sound ceased, a wild cry came from within, and the cabman shouted in alarm, —

"Look out, sir! Come back! There's small-pox there!"

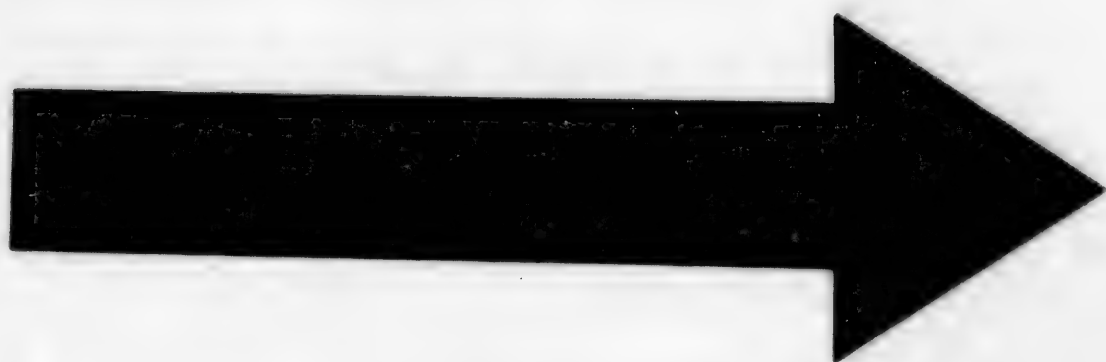
George stepped backward, and there, high beside the door, were the fragments of a yellow placard.

At the same moment the door opened, and a calm-faced Sister of Mercy appeared before the boy. "Etienne Seguin!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said she, in French. "It is he has the disease."

"Etienne! Etienne!" cried George. "Etienne!" and staggering, turned so pale that the kind nun instinctively moved forward to support him. "But, no, I must not touch you," she said, halting. "What is it?"

"I am George Digby," said he, faintly. "This



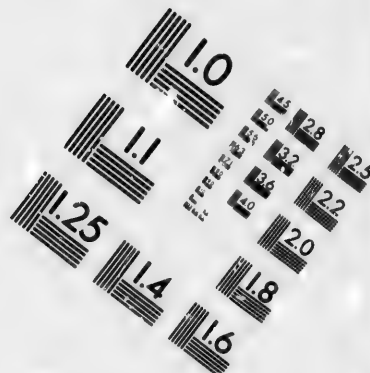
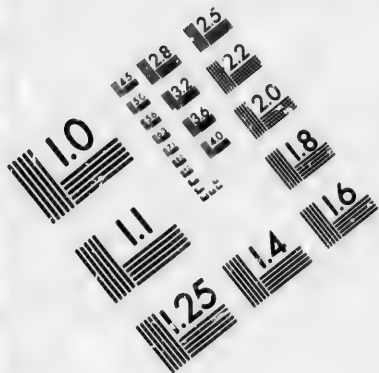
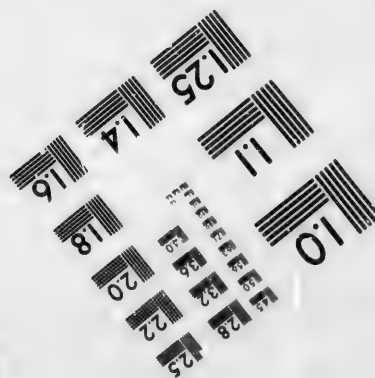
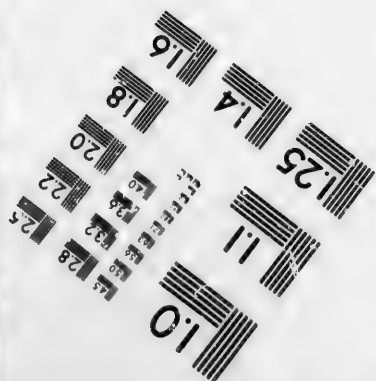
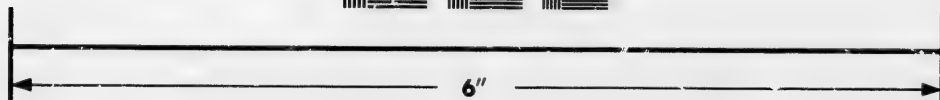
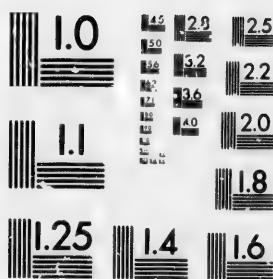


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is the watch. I did not find it till this morning — at home — in my Sunday coat. I came for Etienne."

"Poor boy! poor boy!" said the nun, comprehending all. "I am very sorry for you. Oh, if Etienne could have known this!"

"Is he going to die?"

"It may be. His case is a bad one. He is becoming delirious, raving always then of you and the watch. But it is as God wills," she concluded, resignedly.

Just then there came the sound of the sick boy's voice. "*George Digby — you have not conspired — you would not ruin me!*"

"Etienne! No! no! Oh, for mercy's sake, I didn't know! I have come to tell you!" cried George, in his agony.

There was a hush within. A small crowd of miserable people had already gathered about George. "It is the English boy who made up the lie against Etienne," they said to one another, composedly.

"No," said the nun. "The English boy is a noble boy," and she explained to them.

"The English boy, George Digby!" cried a

woman from behind the Sister. "Ah, murderer! you have killed my Etienne! Monster!"

The nun laid her hand on the mother's arm.

"No. Calm yourself," said she. "He is a good youth," and again she explained. "You had hoped to bring Etienne back, is it not so, my child?" concluded the Sister of Mercy, turning to George.

"Yes. And oh, what shall I do now?" groaned George. "Can he not understand? Could I not make him understand? Oh, what is to become of me if he dies without forgiving me?"

The nun looked thoughtfully at him. "My noble boy," she said, "it may be that you have been sent to save Etienne's life this day. His delirium is but begun; sometimes he is calm; it is always of the watch and you he raves. Could he comprehend, it might be well that his mind would rest from its fever. But *our* voices he knows; he would think we were deceiving him for a purpose. If you have the courage to enter, to let him see you, to speak to him, he may understand. But there is danger for you, great danger."

High above her gentle tones now rose the voice of Etienne, shrill, accusing, terrible: "*George Digby, you have ruined me!*"

"Etienne! Etienne! Don't say it!" George was swept by an impulse beyond control. "Etienne!" he cried, and went swiftly into the miserable house. "Etienne!" he said, withheld at the door of the room by the nun's grasp.

"What? You?" said the sufferer, quite sanely, and turned toward the door.

"It *isn't* Etienne!" groaned George, as he saw the changed face. "Ah yes, I understand! Etienne, I have found the watch. The whole school knows. I beg you to forgive me!"

While the explanation went on, Etienne lay quite still.

"Give me a drink," said he then, faintly, and having received it, spoke clearly. "Yes, I forgive you, George. You have made me happy. I knew what would be believed in my absence; it was maddening. I forgive you, and pity and bless you, George. Did you know I always liked you? That's what made it harder. And now go, go! I pray you may escape this. I will see you again; I will get well."

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When George returned to the street, the people shrank aside from him. He stepped straight toward the cab. The driver motioned him back. "No, no," said he; "I dassent drive you. You would infect my carriage."

"Nonsense!" said the boy. "Why, I must get back instantly to the academy."

"What! Would you infect the school, sir?"

Then George understood what he had lost. "Ferdinand will be Dux," he said, staring at the man. "Etienne lying there, and I out of it. Take me home, then. Ferdinand will be Dux, after all. Poor Etienne!"

"I don't know anything about ducks, sir," said cabby, "but I know as you oughtn't to go home. You'd ought to get disinfected, sir; that's what you'd ought to do. Right away, too. I dassent drive you, but I'll show you where," and George quietly followed him.

Well, then, Ferdinand *was* Dux, but he felt no pride in his hollow victory. Nor did the school admit that he had gained honor with title, medal, and money. In justice, however, it must be told that he saved his credit with his associates.

"Ferdinand Vane, Dux of the year," said the Principal, a fortnight afterward, on Prize-distribution day, "wishes me to speak on his behalf. He admits that George Digby should have been Dux, for poor young Seguin could not have gained the honor, as it is quite certain that the disease was with him on his last appearance here, and would have prostrated him during the examinations. Both George and Etienne deserved the first place. Now, with his father's consent, Vane wishes me to state that the whole sum of the four years' scholarship, four hundred dollars in all, will be paid to Etienne Seguin during his university course. I am glad to say that he is in a fair way to recover."

There was great cheering from the boys.

"As for George Digby, the Academy will present him with a special gold medal and a diploma, testifying that in the special examination granted to him, he has gained a greater number of marks than were ever reached by any Dux of the school."

There was great cheering again, Ferdinand leading.

"And I am ver- happy to tell you that this

honor to Digby originated with Vane's proposal to yield him the Dux medal, and don't you think, boys, that Vane, too, deserves honor, after all?"

There were tremendous cheers for Vane.

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SMOKY DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRE-FIGHTERS.

"HUSH, there's mother's good little girl! Hush, Ann Susan! I thought I heard Peter shouting."

"Shut yer head, Ann Susan! Don't you hear yer maw?" said David Armstrong, the pioneer.

Ann Susan, weary of the smoky and still air that had covered her backwoods world for three days, rubbed her sore eyes and screamed more vigorously. By night the smoke shrouded away the moon and stars. By day the sun was never distinctly visible, except when in mid-sky, where it now hung, red and solid looking, apparently little farther above the Armstrongs' clearing

than the pines on top of the small mountain they called the Hump.

"Hush, Ann Susan! Hush, baby!" said Mary, the eldest daughter, rattling two iron spoons together. "Look what Mary's doing. See what a good little girl Eliza Jane is. Listen if brother Peter's calling."

Ann Susan did not condescend to obey. Eliza Jane, the five-year-old, gazed across the table at the screaming "baby" with an air of superior goodness.

"Hush, there! What's Peter sayin', maw?" said the pioneer, with alarm. "Is he shouting fire? Can you make it out?"

His wife listened intently. "Oh dear, oh dear, it's too bad!" she cried, suddenly, in such anguish that Ann Susan was startled to silence.

For a moment nothing was heard in the log-cabin except the rhythmical roar of the rapids of the Big Brazeau. Then a boy's voice came clearly over the monotone of the river.

"Father! Hurry! There's fire falling near the barn!"

"The barn'll go, sure!" shouted Armstrong, and sprang up so quickly as to upset the table,

whose pannikins, black-handled forks and knives, coffee-pot, tin plates, fried pork, potatoes, and bread clattered to the floor.

As Ann Susan stared at the chasm which had suddenly come between her and Eliza Jane, Armstrong and Mary ran out. The mother, as she tottered after her husband and daughter, wailed, "The barn is going, sure! Oh dear, if only He could 'a' spared the hay!"

The children, left sitting in their high chairs, stared silently at one another, hearing only the hoarse pouring of the river and the buzzing of flies resettling on the scattered food.

"De barn is doin', sure!" echoed Eliza Jane, descending from her elevation. "Baby tum and see de barn is doin'." Ann Susan gave her hand to Eliza Jane, and the two toddled through the wrecked dinner things to the outside, where the sun, yellowed by the motionless smoke-pall, hung like a great orange over the clearing.

As David Armstrong ran toward his son Peter he saw brands dropping straight down as from an invisible balloon. The lighter pieces swayed like blazing shingles; the heavier, descending more quickly, gave off trails of sparks

which mostly turned to ashes before touching the grass.

When the pioneer reached the place of danger, the shower had ceased; but grass fires had already started in twenty places. Peter had picked up a big broom of cedar branches tied together, and begun to thrash at the blaze.

His father and sister joined without a word in the fight against fire that they had waged at intervals for three days, during which the whole forest across the Big Brazeau had seemed burning, except a strip of low-lying woods adjacent to the stream. Night and day one of the four grown Armstrongs had watched for "fire falling," but none of the previous showers of coals, whirled high on the up-draught from the burning woods, and carried afar by currents moving above the still smoke-pall, had come down near the barn.

Now the precious forty tons of stored hay seemed doomed, as scattered locks, strown on the ground outside the barn, caught from the blazing brands. The arid, long and trodden grass caught. Every chip and twig, dry as tinder in that late August weather, blazed

when touched by flame. Sparks, wavering up from the grass to drift a little on no perceptible wind, were enough to start fresh conflagration.

Peter thrashed till all was black around him, but a dozen patches flickered near by when he looked around. Beating, stamping, sometimes slapping out sparks with their bare hands, the father, son, and daughter all strove in vain, while the mother, scarcely strong enough to lift her broom, looked distractedly at the growing area of danger.

"Lord, O Lord, if you could on'y have mercy on the barn! We could make out without the house, but if the hay goes we're done!" she kept muttering. Eliza Jane, hand-in-hand with Ann Susan, watched the conflict, and stolidly re-echoed her mother's words, till both were startled to silence by suddenly catching sight of a strange boy who had ascended from the Big Brazeau's rocky bed to the Armstrong clearing.

None of the other Armstrongs had yet seen the stranger boy, who neither announced himself by a shout, nor stood on the bank more than long enough to comprehend the danger to the

barn. Quickly grasping the meaning of the desperate efforts of the pioneer family, perceiving clearly that the barn was in danger, the stranger remarked, "By Jove!" threw a light pack from his back, unstrapped it, ran down to the river with his large gray blanket, dipped this into the water, and trailing it, flew swiftly to aid in the fight against fire.

"Here, you boy," cried the newcomer to Peter, "come and take the other side of this blanket!" He had already drawn it over the flame-edge nearest the barn and was trailing its wet folds over the quickening blaze. "Hurry; help me to spread the blanket—this is the way!" he cried with decision.

Peter understood and obeyed instantly, though he resented the tone of command.

"Take both corners!" cried the newcomer. "Now then! Do as I do." He and Peter walked rapidly over the wet blanket. When they lifted it the space was black.

"Again!" The stranger spoke in a calm imperative voice. They drew the blanket over another space of light flames, spread it, stamped on it, repeated the entire operation.

"Never mind the fire over there!" cried this commanding youth to David Armstrong. "Come here — gather between the barn and the blanket! Slap out any sparks that fly between!"

The stranger had brought into the struggle a clear plan and orderly action. Now all strove together — brooms and blanket as organs of one fire-fighting machine. In fifteen minutes there was not a spark in the clearing, and the smoke-blackened Armstrongs stood panting about their young deliverer, who was apparently quite cool.

"You give us mighty good help, young feller. Jest in the nick of time, too," said the pioneer, gratefully.

"Aw — very glad, I'm sure," drawled the lad, almost dropping his r's while he flicked his fore-and-aft cap with a gray silk handkerchief. "I rather thought your barn was going, don't you know."

"So it was, if you hadn't jumped in so spry," said Mrs. Armstrong.

"Aw — well — perhaps not exactly, madam. It wasn't to *be* burned, don't you know."

The mystified family stared at this fatalist while he calmly snapped the handkerchief about

his belted blouse, his tight trousers, and even his thick-soled walking boots. When he had fairly cleared his garments of little cinders and dust, he looked pleasantly at the pioneer, and said with a bow: "Mr. David Armstrong, I believe?"

"Dave," said the backwoodsman, curtly.

Peter laughed. He had conceived for the ceremonious youth that slight aversion which the forest-bred boy often feels for the "city feller."

Mrs. Armstrong and Mary did not share Peter's sentiment, but looked with some admiration on the neat little fellow who had shown himself so quick to plan and ready to act.

Peter had rashly jumped to the opinion that the stranger was a "dude" — one of a class much reprehended in the columns of the *Kelly's Crossing Star and North Ottawa Valley Independent*, in whose joke department Peter delighted. There he had learned all that he knew about "dudes."

The stranger in dusting himself, had displayed what even Mary thought an effeminate care for his personal appearance. Not only so,

but he somehow contrived to look smartly dressed though costumed suitably for the woods in a brownish suit of hard "halifax" tweed, flannel shirt, and gray silk tie. Indeed, this small city youth was so handsome, so gracefully built, and so well set up by drill and gymnastics that he could have worn overalls and looked nicely attired. To crown all, he was superlatively at ease.

"Who be you?" inquired the pioneer.

"Aw—my name is Vincent Algernon Bracy."

"A dood, for sure!" thought Peter, trying to suppress his laughter. "Them's the kind o' names they always have. Now if he'd on'y fetch out that eyeglass and them cigarettes!"

At Peter's polite but most unsuccessful attempt to keep his laughter down, his mother and Mary frowned, and into Peter's eyes young Bracy looked indifferently for a few seconds, during which the lads began to have a certain respect for each other.

"He'd be an ugly little chap to run up against," thought the young pioneer, who could not have fashioned what he thought a higher compliment to any boy. But a faint flicker of

amusement in Vincent Bracy's face so annoyed Peter that he wished circumstances were favorable for a tussle — "Just to show him who's the best man."

Vincent Algernon Bracy's thoughts during the same time were, "I wish I could hire this chap for the survey. He looks like the right sort to work. I wonder how I have offended him."

"Where ye from?" asked David Armstrong.

"My place of residence?"

"No. I seen ye're a city feller. Where'd you come from to-day?"

"About ten miles down river."

"Yas. What you doin' there?"

"Camped there last night."

"Alone?"

"Except for sand-flies."

"Yas, they'd give you a welcome. What you travellin' for in this back country all alone?"

"I'm not travelling all alone."

"You said you *was*."

"No, I said I camped alone last night. My chief is camped fifteen miles lower."

"Chief! There don't look to be no Indian in you."

"Chief engineer."

"Oho — now I size y' up. You're one of the surveyors explorin' for the railroad?"

"Not exactly. But I'm on the engineering party."

"Same thing, I guess. When d'ye expect to get the line to here?"

"Next week."

"Why! yer a-goin' it!"

"Yes — the work is to be pushed quickly."

"No — say? It's really goin' to be built this time?"

"Certainly. The company have plenty of money at last. Trains will be running here next spring."

"Hurray! Hear that, maw? The railroad's comin' straight on. They'll want every straw of hay we've got for their gradin' horses."

"Certainly," said Bracy. "It's lucky you saved your hay. How much have you? Ten tons?"

"Forty and more, I guess."

"Really! I congratulate you, by Jove."

"What you say?"

"I'm glad you saved your hay."

"Oh — now I understand. So'm I. It'll fetch mebbly eighty dollars a ton."

"Probably. I've seen hay at a hundred a ton on the Coulonge."

In that district of the great North Ottawa Valley hay frequently sold at such enormous prices before the railway came in. A tract of superior pine had been discovered far from the settlements and where wild hay was not to be found. Transportation over hills, rocks, and ravines was exceedingly costly. Horses were partly fed on bread, on wheat, on "browse" from trees, as well as on oats, but nothing to supply the place of hay adequately could be found. Lumbermen "had to have it," and Armstrong had "moved way back" on purpose to profit by their demand. Unprecedented prices must result from the competition between lumbermen and the advance construction-gangs of the incoming railway.

"Where you off to now all alone?" asked Armstrong.

"I'm going to Kelly's Crossing."

"What for?"

"Well, I suppose I may tell you. My chief could not spare a boat and men for a trip down to Kelly's. We heard of a path from here over the mountain. I am sent this way to hire all the men I can collect at Kelly's."

"I guess you must be a purty smart young feller to be trusted that way."

"You're very kind, I'm sure," and Vincent waved his hand with a deprecatory gesture that did not detract from his confident bearing.

"At any rate," he went on, "I do my best to obey orders. Now, perhaps you will be so good as to show me the path over the mountain."

"The Hump, you mean?"

"Yes, I've heard it called the Hump. How far to Kelly's Crossing?"

"Thirty mile."

"So much? I might almost as well have gone down river."

"No, it's a good, flat path on top there."

"Well, I'm glad of that. Good-day, Mr. Armstrong. Thank you very much. Good-day, madam. Good-bye, Miss Armstrong."

He raised his cap with a bow to each, and

concluding with Peter, remarked, "Good-day, my boy," in an intentionally patronizing tone.

This was Vincent's retort for Peter's grins at the Bracy name, but he had scarcely spoken before he regretted the words; not because they vexed Peter, but because Vincent felt that he had descended below that altitude of manly composure at which he had aimed ever since leaving Upper Canada College a year before.

Even pioneer boys are but mortal, and Peter now lost his temper.

"Ain't you afeard to be out in them woods all alone without your maw?" said he.

"Not at all, thank you. I'm sure it's very kind of you to inquire," replied Vincent, sweetly.

Mary laughed outright.

"He's too smart for you, Peter," said David Armstrong, laughing too. Quite at a loss to meet so affable an answer, Peter wrathfully watched the city boy striding away.

"But say," cried Mrs. Armstrong, "you've forgotten your blanket."

"No, madam," said Vincent, turning round.

"It's not worth my while carrying it. Too heavy, don't you know."

"It *has* got wet and dirty—and such a handsome blanket it was!" said Mrs. Armstrong. "But say, young gentleman, 'tain't fair you should lose your blanket helping us."

"Don't mention it, madam, I beg of you. Very glad to be of service, I assure you."

"Well, anyhow, take a dry blanket. We've got lots — ain't we, paw?"

"We have. Nights is often cold now. You can't sleep out without one—not to say in comfort."

"Well, I will take a dry blanket," said Vincent, after reflection. "I mean to camp at a creek that is about fifteen miles from here, I'm told."

"Yas — Lost Creek."

"Aw — why so called?"

"It gets lost after it runs a good ways, some say. I guess there ain't nobody ever follered it through to the Brazeau."

"Here's a blanket, Mr. Bracy," said Mary, running from the cabin. "It's not such a good big one as yours was."

She was a pretty girl, though now begrimed with smoke and cinders, and Vincent, looking at her with fun twinkling in his eyes, lifted his cap once more off his yellow, curly, close-cropped hair, with an air at which Peter secretly said, "Yah-ah!" in disgust.

"Very good of you, I'm sure, Miss Armstrong," concluded Vincent, as he strapped the blanket. Having placed it back of his shoulders, he made one more grand and inclusive bow, and then rapidly ascended the Hump.

"Well, I'm teetotally blamed if we didn't let him go without a bite to eat," said Peter three minutes later. The pioneer boy, bred in a land where hospitality is given and taken almost as a matter of course, was aghast at the family failure to offer the stranger food.

"Dear, dear! I'm ashamed of myself, so I am," cried Mrs. Armstrong. "After all he done for us! And him that *easy* about it."

"I'll say this for him," remarked the pioneer, "he's cur'us and queer in his talk, but if it wasn't for the spry way he worked that blanket of hisn, the barn was gone sure. He saved me more'n three thousand dollars."

"He can fly round and no mistake, I allow that. 'Tain't the first fire-fightin' he's did," said Peter, forgetting his resentment at the vanished Vincent's overpowering air. "We was near a spat, but I liked him first-rate, all the same."

"Such a name!" said Mary, wishing to justify Peter, now that he had spoken magnanimously.

"Well, he comes of respectable enough folks anyhow — I'll make no doubt of that," said the mother, "but laws! there ain't no denyin' — for if ever there was an outlandish name!"

"Next time I see Vincent Awlgehnnon Bracy, him and Peter Armstrong's going to try which is the best man," said Peter, who conceived, as all the men of the Brazeau do, that "best man" could signify nothing but the man most efficient in rough-and-tumble fighting.

"Better look out you don't go rastlin' with no thrashin' machines, Peter," said his father. "Them city chaps has got all the trips they is, you bet. And up to boxin' too — why, they're scienced! But say, maw, you wasn't never madamed and bowed down to like that in all

your born days before." And the pioneer, chuckling, strode off to watch the fire from a favorable place by the river.

"It's on'y the way he's got o' talkin'. I des-say that's the way he was fetched up," said the mother, indulgently, as she slowly walked with her children to the cabin. The woman moved weakly and was still gasping from the excitements she had undergone.

She was incessantly ailing, working, and overworked,—it is the fate of the pioneer woman, and because she does not chop, nor mow, nor share in the heavier labors that are easy to the great strength of pioneer men she commonly laughs at the notion that overwork is her bane. "I'm just kind o' wore out fussin' round the house" was Mrs. Armstrong's formula.

Striding beside her Peter carried Eliza Jane and Ann Susan on his shoulders, for his good temper had returned, and the little girls were in high delight with their "horse." But suddenly Eliza Jane screamed, the younger child stared dumb with wonder, and Peter set both down hastily in his dismay. His mother had stumbled and fallen heavily forward.

As Peter lifted her he shouted, "Father — come — quick! Oh Mary, is mother dead!" and Mary, looking into the weary face and catching it to her heart doubted her own words as she said "No. Oh Peter, for the love of the Lord, no! I guess she's fainted."

David Armstrong running desperately to the group seized his wife in his arms.

"Stand back!" he cried as he laid her limp form on the arid ground. "Peter — hurry — git water — mother's tuckered out — it's the fear of the barn goin' that ails her. She ain't dead — it couldn't be — oh God it couldn't be!"

Meantime, Vincent Bracy had reached the flat summit of the Hump, and stood on its edge gazing far and wide. Near the horizon, in every direction except toward Kelly's Crossing, the smoke-pall was lurid from fire below. Beyond the mile-wide, low-lying, green forest north of the curving Big Brazeau extended heights which now looked like an interminable embankment of dull red marked by wide patches of a fiercer, whiter glow.

No wind relieved the gloomy, evenly diffused

heat around Vincent on the top of the great hill. No sound reached him but the softened murmur of the rapids, the stridulous shrilling of locusts and tree-toads unseen, and the occasional barking of the Armstrongs' dog away down in the solitary clearing.

"It's almost hot enough up here to begin burning on its own hook," said Vincent, wiping streams of sweat off his forehead and neck. "Shouldn't I be in a pretty scrape if the Hump caught!"

But the thought gave him no pause, nor indeed, any alarm. He had been sent to Kelly's Crossing, and to get there speedily was the dominant point in his mind; so he plunged into the woods, and soon was beyond every visible evidence of the great forest fire, except only the smoke that lay dimly in the aisles of the pinery, and gave its odor and taste to the air.

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER'S CUP OF TEA.

"DON'T you stay in, Davy. I won't faint no more. I ain't sick now—not to say real sick. It's on'y I'm a kind of done out. I'd feel easier if I knowed you was out watching the barn."

"Peter's watchin' all right, maw," answered David Armstrong, gazing from the cabin door at the forest fire across the Big Brazeau. "It looks kind o' squenched some, Hannah."

"Yes. It's always like that about noontime. The sky's lightsomer when the sun's high, so's you can't see the red of the fire. But there it is—threatenin'—threatenin'—it's almost worse than in the night when you can see how big it's grew. *Oh*, if it'd go out; Lord, I feel s'if I couldn't *bear* it to be burnin', burnin', always burnin' and threatenin'. But I wisht you'd go, Davy. You can't do nothin' for me."

"S'posin' you was to faint again, and me not nigh—and you didn't come out of it, Hannah?"

"But I ain't a goin' to, Davy dear," she said, fondly, moved by solicitude so unusual in the work-worn man.

"It'd be hard lines if it did come that way—and you and me so long goin' on together."

"But I ain't goin' to faint no more, Davy dear. It was on'y I got so excited when I thought the barn was goin'. Don't you be feard about me."

"I wisht I knowed what to do for you, Hannah."

"So you do, Davy, speakin' that soft—like it was old times come again. If you'd put your head down onct—just onct."

The grizzled pioneer looked sheepishly at Mary, who stepped out of the cabin, as he put his smoke-blackened face down to his wife's on the bed. She placed her hard hands behind his head and kissed him. Her eyes were tearful, though her smile was joyful, when he rose.

"Well, I s'pose I *had* better go," said the pioneer.

"Yes, Davy. Now I'm all right. You've

done me a heap of good. If I'd on'y a cup of tea!"

"Couldn't you choose a cup of coffee, Hannah? If Mary'd make it good and strong, now?"

"No. Someways I can't seem to relish it when I know it's on'y roasted peas. Don't you trouble, Davy. Go out and let Peter come nearer the house. When you're both watchin', maybe I can sleep. Oh, I *wisht* I could help more!"

"Why now, Hannah — you do help — cordin' to your stren'th — all you can. Say, maybe you could sup some of the labrador."

He took up a handful of leaves that Canadian voyageurs often infuse for warm drink when they lack tea — true coffee is an unknown beverage in that district.

"No, the labrador kind o' goes agen my inside, Davy — it's the tea I'm hankerin' after."

"If I dast leave I'd go out for you, Hannah."

"Out to Kelly's Crossing! Thirty mile and back for a cup of tea for me! This weather!"

"I wisht I dast go. But if the barn'd catch? And hay the price it is!" he said, leaving the

sick woman, who, lying back on the rustling straw bed, drew her thin pillow of hen-feathers about her thin cheeks.

"If the flies'd let me be!" she exclaimed.

"I'll keep 'em off, maw, and you try to sleep," said Mary, waving her straw hat.

"But that's a comfort, Mary!" She lay still for a while, then said, "I'm that *weak*! Oh my!"

"If I'd 'a' thought, I'd 'a' saved up the tea, mother." Mary stooped and kissed her.

"Is Peter a-watchin', Mary?"

"Yes, maw, clost outside. The fire's low-like."

"I can't seem to get no rest for the fear of it. Oh, if the Lord ud send rain! Lord, Lord, Lord!" she wailed, "do hear my prayer for rain! It's been so long a-burnin' and a-burnin' yonder!"

She closed her eyes and listened to the pervasive tone of the rapids. Then, after a few minutes, when Mary had begun to hope she slept, the poor woman, as if dreaming of unattainable bliss, sighed: "*Oh, how I wisht I had a cup of tea!*"

Peter, who had been softly approaching the cabin door, overheard the words, and now the boy and girl looked fearfully at each other, as the misery vibrated in the tones of their usually uncomplaining mother. The son had no words to fashion his yearning for her, but it did not include fear that she was near death. Except that the wisps of straight gray hair beside her ears seemed wider and grayer, she did not look changed from the toil-worn mother he had always seen.

When they were sure she slept, Peter and Mary went outside. Both seemed to hear, over and over again, on the hot, still and smoky air their mother's voice: "*Oh, how I wisht I had a cup of tea!*"

"If we'd on'y thought to ask that young gentleman to fetch in a pound!" said Mary.

"Him? That Bracy? You'd 'a' seen his young gentleman nose turnin' up!"

"No, you wouldn't! He was that friendly."

"Friendly! G'way!"

Mary prudently dropped the matter. After a while, looking at their father's figure outlined against the woods beyond the river, she said,

"If paw'd 'a' fetched in enough tea last time, or gone again."

"Father's gettin' too old for to walk thirty mile and back more'n onct a month. But mother'd ought to have her cup of tea. She's hankerin' bad."

"Hankerin'! Peter, I'm going to tell you right straight. I'm scared about mother. Mother's like to die as sure as you're settin' there, Peter, and then what's to 'come of Ann Susan and Eliza Jane?" sobbed Mary.

"Like to die! Say now, Mary?"

"If she ain't got her tea reg'lar, I mean."

"By cracky, mother's *got* to have her tea!" cried Peter. "What's to hinder me going out?"

"You're not able this weather."

"G'way! Abler nor father any day. Ain't that 'ere dood off for Kelly's Crossin' all alone? Nat'r'lly I ain't able like Vincent Awlgehnnon Bwacy is, but I'm as able as most common folks."

"Don't mock him, Peter. He didn't say his name like that. Not exactly. But you could go better'n that little feller, Peter. Only you can't go no more'n father — not now, for there's the fire and the barn."

"What's the barn alongside of mother's life? And if brands does come, ain't we keeping wet blankets ready now? I'll go and tell father I'm goin' out for mother's tea," and Peter ran across the clearing to speak with his father, who sat on a rail fence and chewed his quid in a mournful way.

"Paw, I'm goin' out to Kelly's. Mother's sick for her tea."

"S'pose you could?"

"Certain sure. Why not?"

"Well, I'm scared to leave maw myself, Peter. On'y it seemed a tur'ble trip for you."

"Tain't nothing."

"Well, you could fetch in more loading than me. On'y if there's fire betwixt here and Kelly's?"

"Can't be. The Hump's all right," said Peter, and looked up to the mountain's crown of pine.

Around the precipitous Hump the Big Brazeau runs circuitously in eighty miles of almost continuous rapids from Armstrong's place to Kelly's Crossing. The distance across the neck is but thirty miles.

"There's never been no fire on the Hump; too high, mebby. I guess you might take an early start in the morning, Peter."

"No, I'm goin' straight away. Mother's needin' her tea that bad I couldn't sleep. I'll fetch in all the stuff we're lackin'."

In winter the Armstrong's could obtain perishable groceries from the stores and "vans" of neighboring lumber shanties, but from March to November, while the shanties were deserted, the pioneer went out once a month to Kelly's Crossing on foot.

"Well, if you're boun' to start, the sooner you're off the better. It'll be nigh dark when you strike Lost Creek. You'll find the young surveyor chap there, Peter."

"So I was thinkin'."

"Don't you quar'l with him! Mebby he'd lick you, Peter," said the pioneer, laughing derisively at his own imagination, as Peter well understood.

"If he don't sass me, there won't be no quar'lin' nor fightin'!" said Peter. "I guess he don't mean no harm; it's on'y his ways is queer."

In ten minutes the pioneer boy, with a long-handled half-axe in his hand, a hunting-knife at his belt, a water-tight tin box of matches in his pocket, and a day's provision of pork and bread in a bag wrapped in his blanket, was on the track over which Vincent Bracy had passed two hours earlier. Finding his mother asleep, Peter had not the heart to rouse her for good-bye.

On the plateau among the pines, where he had hoped for cooler walking, the swooning and smoke-flavored air seemed burned dry as from an over-heated stove. Peter soon regretted that he had brought no water-bottle. But the regrets were too late, — he must endure thirst, and hurry on to relieve it at Lost Creek.

When he reached the stream at about five o'clock in the afternoon Vincent Bracy was not to be seen. Peter shouted in vain. There was no reply.

The young pioneer, after quenching his thirst, peeled off for a roll in the cold, spring-fed stream. After a few plunges he stood out on the bank, and shouted vainly again for the young engineer.

"Lost himself, I'll bet!" said Peter to himself. "Hey—yey—yey!" he yelled. No reply.

"Hey—you city fel-ler!" No response.

"Lost himself sure," said Peter.

"Dood—dood—dood!" he cried, convinced that Vincent was not within hearing. Peter at first thought this sounded "funny" among the solemn aisles. But as the words died on the great silence his mood changed. The quiet and high spirit of the inner forest touched him, he knew not how, to serious thought. At the reflection that the city boy might not be able to find his way out of the woods Peter speedily dressed.

"I believe I'd ought to go back and search him up. He did us a mighty good turn this morning," thought Peter, and just then he noticed two butcher-birds silently flitting about the trunk of a fallen tree.

"There's something dead there," thought Peter.

He went to the log. Behind it, directly on the path, lay the blanket, provision-bag and hatchet of Vincent Bracy.

"Hey — you! Where you hidin'?" yelled Peter.

No answer.

"Hey — Windego caught you?" Peter laughed derisively, and as the great silence returned, felt as if he had laughed in a church.

The butcher-birds gave him close attention. When his shouts ceased, he listened long. As he listened, in the dim solemnity seemed sounds — sounds low, innumerable, indistinguishable, hardly to be called sounds, — tones as if the motionless myriads of pine needles had each its whisper, — and still he doubted whether he heard anything "but just his ears."

Peter sat on a fallen log and waited. He imagined Vincent might have concealed himself "for a joke." Or might he not be searching for a spruce, with little knobby exudations of Peter's favorite "chewing gum."

The strange boy would of course come back to his pack. But Peter's conviction of this began to waver at the end of five minutes without sight or sound of Bracy.

"Hey — who's shootin'?" Peter sprang to

his feet. "The consarned fool—he'll set the woods afire! But it wasn't a gun,—more like a pistol,—likely there wasn't no waddin' in it."

"Hi-yi!" he yelled. "Hi, yi-yi! Hi, you Bracy!"

Peter thought he heard a shout far away. Again he yelled and stopped to listen. But he caught no note of reply. Only the innumerable small sounds had become certainly sounds now.

Peter looked round with curiosity and surprise. The woods had become suddenly alive with small birds,—chicadees, gray-birds, camp-hawks,—they all flew as if from the direction of Kelly's Crossing, not flitting as usual from tree to tree, but going on and on.

Crows flapped steadily overhead, out of sight, cawing as if scared. Spruce partridges rattled past, low in the aisles. All one way—all toward the Brazeau! Peter could not imagine the cause. What could have frightened them? Surely two pistol shots could not have caused this strange migration? Possibly Vincent had followed and treed a wild-cat or bear. Possibly he was off there fighting for his life where the birds started.

Peter picked up his hatchet, felt his knife safe in his belt, and ran toward where he thought the pistol shots had been fired. Presently the innumerable small sounds became a murmur. Zephyrs were stirring. They increased to a breeze. The breeze carried a multitudinous crackling, Peter fancied. The air had warm breaths in it. The crackling grew more distinct. Peter stopped, with his heart beating the alarm.

Then Vincent Bracy came running into view, leaping logs, plainly flying for his life. Far behind him fluttered low what looked like a wide banner of yellow gleams and red, shifting, wavering, flaring. It wrapped and climbed five, fifty, five hundred trees in the next few seconds.

"Back — back — to the creek! Run. The woods are on fire!" shouted Vincent, and Peter was instantly in flight, a hundred yards ahead of the young engineer. A doe, followed at fifty yards' distance by her mottled fawn, sprang crazily past both boys. As Peter jumped into Lost Creek the little fawn, now far behind its maddened dam, scrambled up the opposite bank and went on.

Peter looked back over the shore that rose to the height of his chin. The water was up to his waist. Vincent was at that instant leaping the great log beside which his pack lay. A partridge flying wildly with all its speed struck him in the back just as his jumping body intercepted the bird's line of flight. With the breath knocked out of him, Vincent fell headlong. He did not rise at once. A brown hare leaped over him and came on.

Sparks were already flying in a swift storm overhead. The breeze created for itself by the advancing flame had risen to a furious gale, under which the forest roared and shrieked. The wall of fire poured off sparks and smoke in a prodigious shaken volume, that rolled on, now up, now down.

"What's the matter?" yelled Peter, as Vincent fell. He could hear no reply. He could not hear his own voice above the fire-fury. He could not see Vincent. Peter pulled himself up the creek's bank and faced the coming flame.

A blast of heat flew past him. Smoke hid the whole forest for an instant. As it whirled

up again Peter saw Vincent staggering aimlessly thirty yards away, with blood flowing over his face from the scalp-wound he had received in falling on a branch. Blindly he swayed, tripped, fell.

"We're both goners," yelled Peter Armstrong; "but here goes!" and he ran straight at the prostrate boy.

Vincent rose again. In the next moment he would have been clinging round Peter had not the tall young pioneer stooped to elude the grasp. There was not an instant for parley. Peter knew exactly how he might best carry his load. Bending as he ran in he thrust his head between Vincent's legs, grasped them as he rose, turned, sped back.

"Don't move!" yelled Peter.

Bracy made no struggle. A roll of smoke and sparks enveloped the boys. It lifted, and again the path was visible. But the thick carpet of pine-needles had begun to flame under Peter's tread.

A blast as from an open furnace enveloped the two. Peter stumbled, staggered up, took three steps, fell headlong—into water. The

full roaring and tumult of the fire was in his ears as he rose spluttering from the water of Lost Cree^k, and pulled Vincent above the surface. With the cold plunge, the city boy had quite recovered his senses. He stood up, stared, recognized his rescuer, and remembered his manners even then:—

“Thank you. You saved my life!” he shouted in Peter’s ear.

“Saved it! D’you s’pose —”

The sentence broke off because both boys had plunged their heads, so intense was the hot blast that flew at them. When they came up Vincent shouted:—

“I said you saved my life. You were about to remark —”

“Remark!” roared Peter. “Saved your life! S’pose you’re going to get out of *this* alive?”

Down went both heads. When they rose again Vincent shouted:—

“We are in rather a bad hole, but —”

Under they went again.

Nothing more was said for what seemed a great length of time. The boys could endure

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the intense heat but for an instant. Their heads bobbed out only that they might snatch a breath. At such moments they heard naught but crashing and the revelry of flame.

CHAPTER III.

FLAME AND WATER.

WITHIN twenty minutes after Peter Armstrong and Vincent Bracy had sprawled into Lost Creek the draught from the forest fire was almost straight upward. No longer did volumes of smoke, sparks, and flame stoop to the floor of the woods, rise again with a shaking motion, and hurry on like dust before a tornado. But smoke rose so densely from decaying leaf-mould that the boys could see but dimly the red trunks of neighboring trees. Overhead was a sparkling illumination from which fiery scales flew with incessant crackling and frequent reports loud as pistol shots.

Out of the layer of clear air close to the creek's cool surface the boys could not raise their heads without suffocation. They squatted, staring into one another's fire-reddened faces. Deep edges of leaf-mould on the creek's banks

glowered like two thick bands of red-hot iron.

"Boo-oo! It's cold," said Peter, with chattering teeth.

"Yes, I'm shivering, too. Rather awkward scrape," replied Vincent.

"It's freeze in the water, or choke and burn out of it."

Their heads were steaming again, and down they plunged.

"See the rabbits! And just look at the snakes!" cried Peter, rising.

"The creek is alive!" Vincent moved his head out of the course of a mink that swam straight on.

Brown hares, now in, now out of the water, moved crazily along the shallow edges; land snakes writhed by; chipmunks, red squirrels, minks, wood rats—all went down stream at intervals between their distracted attempts to find refuge under the fire-crowned shores. The boys dipped and looked again.

"The smoke is lifting," said Vincent.

"If it'd only let us stand up long enough to get warm all over!" said Peter.

Down went their heads.

"You *do* think you're goin' to get out of this alive?" inquired Peter, as they looked round again.

"The menagerie has a plan." Vincent pointed to the small creatures moving past.

"Plan! No! no *plan*. They're just movin' on."

"Let's move with them."

"Can't walk squattin', can ye?"

"We can soon stand up."

"Then we'll bile."

"Then we'll dip."

"Well, you're good stuff. We'll push for the Brazeau. But I don't expect we'll get there."

"Why not?"

"Man, it must be thirty mile by this creek! S'pose we could wade ten miles a day! D'ye think you're goin' to stand three days' shiverin' and roastin'? Cracky, it's hot!" and they plunged down again.

"More'n that," said Peter, rising from his dip, "there ain't no knowin' where this creek goes to."

"It goes down hill, and it must reach the Brazeau somewhere. Perhaps within twenty miles."

"S'pose it does? What you goin' to do to sleep and eat? No livin' 'thout eatin', I guess. This fire'll burn fierce for three days. No gettin' through the woods for a week."

"But it may rain heavily."

"Yas? Mebby it'll rain pork and bread."

"Or chipmunks and squirrels," Bracy pointed to the swimming creatures.

"Jimimy, that's so! We might catch some of 'em. Cracky, my head's burnin' again!"

Down they went.

"We might stand up. The smoke has risen a good deal," said Vincent, after ten minutes more.

"Wadin's better'n standin'," remarked Pete, so they began to march with the procession.

Though the heat was still intense, it did not now fly in blasts. On rising they steamed quickly, and dipped again and again. Occasionally they saw far into the burning region, where the trunks of dry trees glowed fiercely. The living pines were no longer clothed with

columns of flame, for the resinous portions of their outer bark had been consumed. But from their denuded tops sparks blew upward incessantly, while branches swayed, snapped, and sometimes fell.

The up-draught could no longer carry away the heavier brands. Some wavered down into the creek, that soon became covered with a scum of half-burned bark and ashes; through which the swimming creatures made little gleaming lanes.

Flame moved continually to and fro on the forest floor, now dwindling, then rising suddenly from new-found pyres, always searching insatiably for fuel. The roar of hurrying fire had ceased, but the sounds of crackling and crashing branches were so great that the boys became hoarse with shouting their remarks.

Then dumbly they pursued their journey of the night through fifteen hundred square miles of fire. Across the glaring brook they saw one another as dream figures, with fire-reddened faces against a burning world. For what seemed many hours they marched thus in the water. Splashing, wading, often plunging, they

staggered on in various agonies until Peter's brain, tired by his days and nights of watching for falling brands in his father's clearing, whirled in the low fever of fatigue. The smoke-wraiths, as he stared at the encompassing fire, drifted into mocking, mowing, beckoning forms, and with increasing difficulty he summoned his reason against the delusions that assailed his soul.

Young Bracy, accustomed to long marches and having rested well the previous night, retained his clear mind, and watched his tall companion with the care of a brother.

"He risked his life for mine," Vincent felt deeply, and accepted the comradeship with all his steady heart. He guided Peter, he guarded him, he did not despair utterly, and yet to him it seemed, as that strange night went on, that the walk through fire had been longer than all his previous life. He was in a deepening dreamy dread that thus they must march till they could march no more, when Peter, wild to look upon something else than flame-lit water, went aside and climbed the bank. That newly roused Vincent; he crossed the creek and ascended, too. Up there the heat was more intense, the smoke

more pungent, the ground burning. They kicked up black ashes, saw sparks start as in smouldering straw, and jumped, half-scalded with steam from their clothing, back to the bed of the stream.

"It's dreadful work, Peter!" said Vincent, taking the young pioneer's arm.

"We're done, I guess. But it would be mean to give up. We'll push on's long's we can. Say — when I drop, you push on. Never mind me. No use us both dyin'."

"We shall stick together, Peter," Vincent replied stoutly. "We shall pull through. See, the banks are getting higher. The water is running faster. We shall reach a gully soon and get rest."

Peter laughed hysterically at the prediction, and screamed derision at it; but the words roused some hope in his heart. He bent his gaze to watch the contours of the banks. They were certainly rising higher above the water. Gradually the creek descended. When they had passed down a long, shallow, brawling rapid, the fire-forest was twenty feet higher than their heads. They no longer needed to

dip often. In the hot night their clothing rapidly dried.

"Hello! Where is the procession?" cried Vincent. The boys stared far along the water. Not a snake, chipmunk, squirrel, mink, nor any other wild refugee was to be seen.

"They've gone in under the banks. We can stop, too," said Peter.

"No. Too many branches falling, Peter. Let us push on to a lower place."

"I won't! I'm going to sit down right here."

"Well, but look out for the branches. They are falling — whopping big ones too, in every direction. No chance to sleep yet. Trees may be crashing down here before morning. We must go lower."

"The hunger is sore on me. If we'd on'y caught some of them squirrels!"

"I've got a couple of hard-tack in my pocket. They are soaked, but all the better for that." He brought several handfuls of pulp from the breast pocket of his belted blouse. While Peter devoured his share, Vincent ate a few morsels and put the rest back in his pocket.

"You're not eating," said Peter.

"I shall need it more before morning."

"There won't be no morning for you and me. Is it all gone?"

"No. We'll share the rest when we stop for the night. Come on, Peter; you'll die here."

"I won't! I'll sleep right here, die or no die."

Peter stretched himself, steaming slowly, on the pebbles. The ruddy fire shone on his upturned face and closed eyes. Vincent looked down on him meditatively. He was casting about for words that would rouse the young pioneer.

"What do you suppose your mother is doing now?" cried Vincent, sharply.

But Peter had instantly fallen asleep. Vincent stooped, shook him powerfully by the shoulder, and repeated the question at the top of his voice: —

"What do you think your mother is doing now?"

Peter sat up.

"Burnt! Burnt out, as sure as we're here!" he cried. "The barn'll be gone. We're ruined!

And mother's out in the night. My soul, how could I forget her! I was dazed by the fire. They'll think I'm burned. I'm afeard it will kill mother. She'll be lying in the root house. They'd run there when the house caughted."

His distress was such that Vincent almost regretted the artifice he had employed.

"It's likely everything at your home is all right, Peter," he said. "I've seen a hill fire like this flaming for days, and nothing burned below in the valleys. The wind seemed to blow up to the high fire from all sides below."

"Yes — nobody can tell what a bush fire'll do," said Peter. "Mebby mother is all right. Mebby the hay *ain't* gone. But they'll all be worn out with fear for me. Come on. If the creek goes on like this, we may reach the Brazeau to-morrow."

"It's eleven o'clock now," said Vincent, looking at his watch. "I'm nearly tired out, myself. We shall go on all the faster for sleeping. Hello — what's that? — a fall?"

The sound of brawling water came faintly. Descending quickly, they soon reached a place

where the creek appeared to pour, by a succession of cascades, into a deep chasm. Below, they could see nothing, except the gleam of distant water, as flaming brands swayed down and down from the plateau now fifty feet over their heads.

Here the coping of the banks overhung a little. All about the boys lay brushwood that had been left by spring floods. Peter, seizing a piece of dry cedar, flung off long splinters with his big hunting-knife. When enough for two torches had been accumulated, the boys searched for a route down. In five minutes they were a hundred feet below the top of the Hump.

"Why, here's a good path," cried Vincent.

"Great place for bears," said Peter, closely examining it. "If we're goin' to stop, we'd better stop right here. The gully below may be full of bears and wolves. They'd be drove out of the woods and down the gully before the fire."

"Let's make a fire to keep them away from us," said Vincent.

"No need. No beasts will come nigh."

"But some may be coming down after us as we did, for safety."

"No! They'd burrow under the bank back there. No fear of them, anyhow. They'd be too scared to bother us. But a fire won't do no harm."

Finding no brands handy, they lit shavings from the matches in their little water-tight, tin boxes, piled on the heaviest driftwood they could find, and lay down on a flat rock partly under the bank. In a few minutes both fell asleep to the clashing of the cascades.

Brands fell and died out near them; their bivouac fire became gray; dawn struggled with the gloom overhead till the smoke ceased to look red from below, and became murky in the sunless morning. Still the tired boys slept well.

But by eight o'clock they had descended the rocky hill down which the cascades jumped, and were gazing at hundreds of trout congregated in the clear long pool below.

"There's plenty of breakfast if we could only catch it, Peter," said Vincent.

"Catchin' them trout ain't no trouble," said Peter, taking command. "You go down yonder and whale on the water with a stick. I'll whale

up here. We'll drive a lot of 'em into the shaller."

"But how can you catch them without hook or line?"

"Leave me alone for that. I've got a hook and line in my pocket, but that'd be slow."

As they thrashed the water while approaching one another, many of the crowded and frantic trout ran almost ashore. Rushing among them, Peter kicked vigorously at each step forward. Two fish flew far up the bank. Three more were thus thrown out. Several ran ashore. Vincent flung himself on these before they could wriggle back.

They split the fish open, skewered them flat on sticks, and broiled them "Indian fashion" in the smoke and blaze from a fire of dry wood. Having thus breakfasted, they considered what to do.

Going back was out of the question. Fire was raging two hundred feet above them, and for unknown leagues in every direction. Their only course was down the deep gully of the creek.

By eleven o'clock, having walked steadily

along the Lost Creek's now easy descent, they found the crags overhead so closely approaching that the gorge, now little illuminated from the burning forest, became ever more gloomy. At last the sides of the ravine, when more than three hundred feet above them, came together as a roof.

The boys stood at the entrance to a narrow cavern. Into this high tunnel, roughly shaped like a greatly elongated V turned upside down, the creek, now fed to a considerable volume by rivulets that had danced down the precipices, clattered with loud reverberation.

"What we goin' to do now? Seems we're stuck at last," said Peter.

"Let's see. This is where the creek is lost. The question is, Where does it come out?"

"We're in a bad fix. There's no goin' back till the bush-fire's done."

"Well—we can live here for a few days. Plenty of trout in that last pool."

"But there ain't no Armstrongs in it! I'm wild to get home. Lord, Lord, what's happened to mother? I tell you I'm just crazy to get back home and see."

"You must be, Peter. So we must push on if possible. No use trying to get up to the top of this ravine. It's all fire up there on both sides. Well, let us explore the cave. We can always find our way back. We will take torches."

"Did you see a creek coming out of a place like this when you came up the river to our clearing?"

"No, but there's one coming out of a cave away down below Kelly's Crossing."

"Yes, I know. But this ain't that one."

"No, of course not. It is likely this creek runs out some distance before reaching the Brazeau. Perhaps the cave is not a long one. We're safe to explore, at any rate."

"Do you mind the bears' path up back there? There's room for all the bears on the Brazeau in there ahead of us," said Peter.

"Our torches will scare them worse than they'll scare us. And I've got my revolver still."

"Say! I forgot to ask you; did you fire two shots just before the fire started in the woods?"

"Yes — at a partridge. Missed him."

"Then you started the fire!"

"No! It came roaring along a minute after that, though."

"Started itself—that's gen'llly the way," said Peter. "Well, s'pose'n we have dinner, and go in after."

They cooked more trout, supplied themselves with bunches of split cedar, and stood peering into the entrance of the cavern, both a little daunted by the absolute darkness into which the stream brawled. By anticipation, they had the eerie sensation of moving through the bowels of a mountain. So high and dark and awful was the narrow tunnel! So insignificant felt the boys beneath its toppling walls!

"Here goes," said Vincent, and marched ahead.

For some minutes the creek's bed was such as it had been since they left the cascades—gravel bottom alternating with rocks, and little pools that they walked easily around. What was high above could not be seen, for the torches found no reflections up there on the cavern's roof.

Instead of the reverberation increasing, it les-

sened as they went on. The brook babbled to them to advance, and now there was a singular trembling of the air in which a swashing and pouring sound could be heard.

"Got plenty of room over there?" cried Peter, from the left or north bank.

"Yes, there's ten feet of shore here. Cross if you're crowded."

"I will. There's no room on this side."

As Peter lowered his torch to peer at the water, in which he was about to step that he might cross it, he saw that the stream broke into a chute a little further on. Now Vincent had stopped to await his comrade.

The pioneer boy entered the water at the rapid's head, where he expected to find the usual shallow. But at the first step the currents rushed about his knees. Peter half staggered, found what he thought would serve for forward footing, threw his weight on it, slipped as from a boulder, and went down. His torch "sizzed" and disappeared. Vincent darted forward with a cry.

As Peter, struggling to reach his feet, drifted a little, he felt himself suddenly caught as by a

strong millrace, and was hurried away into the blackness of darkness. Vincent Bracy, swinging his torch, ran on almost blindly and at full speed, till he collided with a wall of rock and fell backward. His fallen torch went out just as Peter, now fifty feet down stream, righting himself, struck out to swim across the current. With a few strokes he touched the rock and strove to grasp it, but his hand slipped and slipped against a straight and slimy rise.

The pioneer boy, now wholly unable to see the space in which he was struggling, put down his feet, but touched no bottom. Swimming to the other side, he found the channel but a few yards wide. There, too, he grasped vainly for a hold. The water quite filled the space between the rock walls. He turned on his back and floated. The amazing, calm rapid swept him swiftly on.

And so, through what seemed a long and smooth stone slide, but once interrupted by broken water, Peter, while Vincent lay senseless in the cave, was carried away feet first as corpses go from the world to the grave.

CHAPTER IV.

RAIN ON THE BRAZEAU.

ALL night and all forenoon rain had poured, while the pious folk of the back country of the Big Brazeau blessed God that He had saved them from the fires of the forest. Rivulets clattered down the rocky sides of the Hump; the Brazeau waved in increasing volume; and a hundred wild tributaries tinged the great Ottawa with turbidity that slowly mingled in its brown central volume.

Dumb creatures rejoiced with men in the moist coolness after so long a period of drought, smoke, and flame. Ducks squawked satisfaction with new-filled farm ponds; cattle, horses, even hens forsook shelter as if they could not have too much assurance of the rain's actuality; dragged rats, flooded from their holes, scurried away as girls with petticoats over their heads went to the milking. By noon on the second

day after Peter Armstrong and Vincent Bracy had started for Kelly's Crossing, the rain had diminished to a drizzle that promised to continue long. Still Lost Creek brawled enlarged into the cavern, and still the forest on the Hump smouldered and poured up blue smoke to the sky.

David Armstrong's cabin and barn stood intact; all in the clearing were still alive, for the high fire had blown far across the river without dropping many coals into the opening of tillage by the Hump's side. But the strain of watching for Peter had brought his mother close to the grave.

"I'm not to say exactly dying. But I'm tired, Davy, tired to be alive. It's, oh, for Peter, poor, poor Pete," she wailed without tears, lying motionless on her rustling bed.

Mary was frying a pan of pork on the outdoor stove. Ann Susan and Eliza Jane, brisk with the fresh air after rain, played on the cabin floor, and watched the cooking with interest. When Mary brought in the frizzling food, David Armstrong did not rise from beside his wife's bed.

"Give the young ones their bite and their sup, Mary. Mebby I'll feel to set in after a bit," she said.

"Take your dinner, Davy," said Mrs. Armstrong, trying to release her thin, hard hand. "Eat a bite, do. It's not the sorrow that will strengthen you to get out them rails for building up the burned fences."

"No, Hannah, but I misdoubt I can't eat. Them molasses and bread I eat at breakfast has stayed by me good."

"But you've got to keep alive, Davy."

"Yes, a man's got to live till his time comes—the hunger will come back on me, so it will, and it's druv to eat he is. But God help us—it's to think we'll see Peter no more!"

The woman lying on the bed pressed her forehead down on his hand, and so they remained, close together, while Mary fed the children. Tears were running down the pioneer's cheeks, thus furrowed often that day and the day before. But the mother could not weep.

"I yant Pete," whined Ann Susan.

At that the lump of agony rose in Armstrong's throat; he could not trust himself to

speak, though he wished to order the child to be silent. Mary struggled with her sobs as she listened.

"I yant Pete," said Ann Susan again.

"Peter is dead! I wisht he'd come back quick," said Eliza Jane.

Mary had vainly tried to make the children understand what had become of the big brother.

"I yant Pete," persisted the younger.

"Peter's gone away dead. He's burned up. I wisht he'd come and ride me on his foot," returned Eliza Jane.

"I'll ride you," said Mary.

"No, I want Peter!"

"Hush, dear — poor brother Peter won't come back no more."

"Let 'em talk, Mary," said the woful mother.

"Poor little things — they help me. Oh, I want Peter, too."

She sprang up, sitting, and broke into wild lamentation.

"Oh Peter, if you'd come back and kiss me good-bye! Why couldn't you wake me when he was going away? I'd 'a' stopped him. Thirty mile! Thirty mile and back — and the bush

afire!—only to fetch a cup of tea for his mother! I—I—my son's blood cries out of the woods against me!"

"No, Hannah, no, don't talk on that way again. It was me that let him go. Who'd 'a' thought fire would 'a' started up the Hump?"

"Oh, no, Davy, I—me—crying like mad for tea! Oh, my God!—how you can *want* me to go on livin'! And Peter up there—burned black in the smoke under the rain! Such a good boy—always—strong and good. There ain't no mother got a helpfuller boy nor my Peter. Davy, what you s'pose I was thinkin' all them days sinst the hay was got in—and the big prices there is? I was layin' out how we could give Peter a winter's schoolin' in to the settlements. Yes—he'll learn quick. Oh, if I wasn't always so tired, what'd I do for my Pete."

She lay still a long time before speaking again.

"You'll miss me sore, Davy," she whispered. "It won't be long now."

"No, Hannah, don't say it. You'll not leave me, Hannah."

"Ay—sore you'll miss me, Davy dear—I

know how I'd 'a' missed you. Old and gray we've got, and once we was young together. Davy, don't you understand? Don't talk on. I want to be with my boy."

The man clutched, sobbed, and choked for breath. Mary went to the bed, and clasped her arms about her parents' necks.

"Yes — you're good at lovin' your mother," the poor woman went on. "All of them is. God bless them for it! They give me what I wanted more than all. Sore you'll miss me, too, Mary, and you fendin' for them all alone. I wisht I could stay. You'll tell Peter — no, I was forgetting — but there is a chance, ain't there? There's a *chance*!"

"Yes, Hannah. S'posin' he was at the creek. Or the fire might 'a' jumped over a wide place?"

"Many's the day and many's the night and many's the year Peter's heart'll be glad thinkin' how he went thirty mile and out for tea for his mother," she said, as if dreaming. They thought she was fainting. But the vision of her son in the burning forest returned to her mind.

Then, with changed voice, rising on her elbow: —

“Davy, if on’y we could find his bones!”

“I’ll start first thing to-morrow, Hannah.”

“All night again I’ll be thinking of the rain fallin’ on him lyin’ there in the smoke. Rain and rain and *rain* and RAIN — it come too late to save my boy!”

“Think of the chances, Hannah. Maybe he ain’t dead at all.”

“He is — I seen him lyin’ there too plain. Peter won’t never come no more!”

“Peter won’t never tum no more,” repeated Eliza Jane.

“I yant Pete,” said Ann Susan, firmly

“Give them to me,” said the mother. Taking the little girls in her arms, she lay still, thinking how soon Mary must mother them.

The children, awed by the silent passion with which she strained them to her breaking heart, lay still, breathing uneasily, with their faces close to her bosom.

After a time, the sense that they were suffering came to the poor mother, and she held them more loosely. Then her brain began to work on

the possibilities of Peter's escape. The woman had to hope or die, and her vitality was still active. Absorbed, she had again clutched close the wondering infants, when strange voices outside the door recalled her fully to her senses.

"Hey! Who's these men? Why, here's that surveyin' boy! No, it's another one."

A man, and a youth clad as Vincent Bracy had been, but taller, came up the steps into the cabin. The youth was Vincent's rodman.

"I have a letter for you, Mr. Armstrong," he said. "It's about your son."

The mother rose, and stood staggering.

"Where's Peter?" she cried.

"I don't know, Mrs. Armstrong. The letter—it's from Mr. Bracy. He and Peter went through the fire together."

"The fire didn't get them?"

"No, ma'am."

"Oh, thank God, thank God! I can stand it if he's not dead that way. But where is he? Alive?"

"Bracy hopes so."

"Peter's lost, then?"

"He is—in a way. But let me read you

Mr. Bracy's story. He was up nearly all night writing it. He thought it would ease your heart to know all about it. The chief engineer sent me up on purpose that you should know what is being done."

"He didn't desert Peter, then? No—I'm sure."

"Not much! They were separated by a strange accident. Listen." He began reading the letter.

Vincent had written out pretty fully the story of his march with Peter down Lost Creek, through the fire and to the cavern's mouth. The letter went on:—

"When I picked myself up, my torch was almost out. I whirled it till it blazed, and then saw that I had run across the old channel of the creek and against a solid wall of rock that ran up to the roof of the cave, I suppose. Peter was gone down the water that was running within two yards of me. All I heard was its rushing into the passage that turned to the left.

"At that place, the cave forks like a Y. The water runs down the left arm of the Y, and fills the whole space between the high walls there.

That stream looks as if it had broken down slanting through the bed of its course and run into the left arm of the Y, after it had been running into the right arm for ages.

"I was lying at the fork of the Y, in the right-hand passage, while Peter had been swept away down the other passage into darkness."

"He's gone, gone forever!" moaned Mrs. Armstrong.

The young rodman read on in Vincent's letter:—

"When I got up and tried to look down the passage after Peter, I heard a pouring sound away ahead as well as the rushing of the water. That was while I was stooping over. The passage I was in was wider than the other, and I thought it must lead me into any place that Peter could be carried to. The other cave, down river below Kelly's Crossing, has passages that branch and come together again."

"That's so," said the pioneer.

"So I thought it best to follow the right-hand passage instead of going in after Peter. I hope you will see that I did not wish to desert him. My idea was that I might reach him soon,

and if he was in any distress, I might be all the better able to help him if I went by the dry passage."

"He did right," said the pioneer.

"Vincent would be glad to hear you say that," said the rodman. "He was greatly distressed by his miscalculation."

"Then he didn't find Peter again?" cried the mother.

"He will find him. We know he must be still in the cave. Ten men went up before daylight to reach him. There's reason for hope. Listen again to Vincent's letter: I lit another bundle of cedars, and went on. Pretty soon the cavern began to rattle with the thunder outside. The air vibrated so much that one might almost fear the cave wall would fall in. I could not see a flash of lightning at all. How long I went on I don't know, but it seemed half a mile or more. My last torch had just been lighted when I had a great scare, and saw the strangest sight!

"For some time there had been a strong smell as of wild animals. Suddenly the passage in front of me seemed alive with creatures

that snarled, growled, yelped, and ran. Now you'll understand that those beasts couldn't trouble Peter. He went with the stream—they had been forced into the dry passage by the fire. And they were much afraid of my torch. I could not see one of them at first—there was nothing but blackness and the yelling and snarling. It grew fainter as they ran away, without looking around, for I never saw a glint of their eyes.

"At last, as the course of the old channel turned, I saw daylight ahead of me, and a crowd of beasts going out of the cave's mouth. I made out some bears, that shuffled along at the tail of the procession, but I could not clearly see the others. But I'm pretty sure there were wolves, skunks, and wild-cats in the herd. I was anxious to reach daylight, for I supposed I should see Peter out there. But when I reached the mouth of the cave, I saw nothing of him or the creek."

"Peter's lost! We shall never see him!" said his mother.

"Yes, you will. Listen to the letter," said the rodman. "Vincent has something impor-

tant to tell of that he heard coming through. He says :

"I think we shall find Peter to-morrow morning. There must be a hole from the passage I came through to the passage he went down. The reason I think so is this: Just where I stood when I saw the animals go out of the cave's mouth, I thought I heard a sound of falling water — that must have been the creek. The sound seemed to come from above my head. Perhaps I had passed the entrance to another corridor without noticing it, for I was a good deal taken up with fear of the beasts ahead of me.

"We are going as soon as the men have had a sleep, to look up the place where the sound of falling water came from. I think we shall find Peter there, for if he had come through before me, or soon afterward, I should have heard him answering to my shouts."

Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong looked hopelessly at each other.

"Vincent," said the rodman, "was so tired that he seems to have forgotten to write out here some things he told us in camp. For in-

stance, one of his reasons for supposing there must be a passage to Peter is this: the floor of the passage Vincent came through began to ascend while he was looking at and following the animals. He did not remember where he had passed off the gravel and sand of the old bed of the creek, but he found he had passed off it a good while before he reached the open air. After he began to think of something besides the beasts, he noticed that he was going up a slowly rising floor of rock, where no water had ever run. So you see the ancient channel of the creek turned off somewhere. It never flowed where Vincent came out, but took a turn to where Peter is. You can understand that?"

"Yes — the water had been kind of stopped by the rise of the rock, and turned off," said Armstrong; "and the idea is that the old channel the water used to follow will lead you to where Peter went by the channel that the water follows now."

"Exactly, that's what Vincent thinks. Now he is going, or rather he did go before daylight with ten men, to look up that passage through which the sound of water came. He'll find

Peter," said the rodman, confidently. "But listen—you may as well hear the rest of his letter:—

"I looked for the place where the creek came out of the mountain, but the air was dark with the storm, and the thunder was rattling. So I could hear no water running except the rapids of the Brazeau not far ahead. I thought I had better go to camp for men. So I climbed down the hill to the river, found I remembered the banks below, and went about four miles down stream to camp, where I am now. Tomorrow morning, long before you get this letter, I will find Peter if I have to follow him down the chute."

"He will do it, too," said the rodman, admiringly. "The little beggar has any amount of pluck. He'll risk his life to find your son."

"Peter is dead for sure," said his hopeless mother.

"Well, I don't b'leeve it, maw," said Mary. "Mr. Bracy's going to fetch him back—that's what I think."

"It might be so, Hannah," said the pioneer. "Where you two going?" he asked of the rod-

man and axeman who had come with Vincent's letter.

"Straight back to camp."

"I'll join you," said David Armstrong.

"There's no use. Peter's gone—he'd be drowned anyway," said the poor mother, with the first burst of tears since her son left.

"He's a good swimmer, isn't he?" asked the rodman.

"First-rate," said Mary.

"Then why should he not escape? He'd go through a big rapid safely. What was the chute but a smooth rapid in the dark? Vincent will find him."

"Dead!" said the mother.

"No—safe and sound."

"But he'd be eat up by the bears."

The rodman looked uneasy, but spoke confidently:—

"Bears won't come to a fire, and your son had his watertight match-box, and could make a fire if he landed down below."

"With what?"

"With driftwood. Vincent says there was driftwood along the banks inside the cave

just the same as on the banks outside and above."

"It might be," said the mother, striving for hope. "Oh, mebbby my son will come back! Davy," she whispered, as her husband reappeared in readiness for the journey down the river, "if you don't find him, I'll die. I can't keep up without seeing Peter again. Carry him easy if he's dead — but no, I daren't believe but he's alive."

CHAPTER V.

IMPRISONED IN THE CAVE.

WHEN Peter Armstrong, with all his senses about him, floated on his back, on and on through the cavern's unmitigated darkness, down the steep slide of almost unbroken water, he was not without fear of the unknown before him. But the fear was not in the nature of despair—rather of wonder. A stolid conviction that the worst which could befall him would be less dreadful than the fire-death which he had escaped helped to console the young pioneer.

Wonder predominated in his mind—wonder at the smoothness, swiftness, and length of the chute. This wonder had almost become horror at being so borne on and on through darkness, when the current seemed to go from under him, and down he tumbled, head over heels, into a great depth of bubbling and whirling water.

Its currents pulled him this way and that,

rolling him helplessly. The forces pressed him deeper and deeper until, all in an instant, they thrust him aside. An up current caught him and brought him, gasping and spluttering, to the air. He perceived with joy that impenetrable darkness no longer filled the cavern. It was dimly lighted from the outer world.

Peter soon cleared himself from the indraw of the cascade which, jumping straight down thirty feet, scarcely disturbed at a hundred feet distance the long pond into which it fell. The boy trod water, gazed, and listened amazed to the crashing of thunder that rolled over and reverberated in the high vault.

He knew a rain and thunder storm had begun. The cavern, during intervals between the lightning flashes that revealed something of its extent, was dimly lighted from a narrow crack or fissure, which was about three hundred yards distant from and directly opposite to the cascade down which Peter had dropped.

This crack, starting from the floor of rock, went up nearly straight two hundred feet to a hole in the roof. Peter, swimming now in smooth water, thought that this hole, so irreg-

ular in shape, looked like one that would be seen from the inside of his father's barn if some one had battered in its gable end.

Above this hole he could see a patch of sky and storm-clouds hurrying. They were distinctly visible—he saw the sky through the hole as one might see it from a place two hundred feet down a slanting tunnel. And the tall, narrow strip of sky which he saw through the narrow fissure that extended from the cavern's floor to the roof-hole was as if seen from one end of a cathedral aisle through a straight, narrow crack in its wall of masonry.

Peter swam to the right or south bank of the creek, landed, and stared all around the cavern. The ravine, though roofed, was, so far as he could distinguish by the lightning's gleams, much such a ravine as he and Vincent had followed before the creek became subterranean.

The main differences he noted were a considerable increase of the cavern's width, and its intersection by another ravine, also covered. The floor of this intersecting cavern was some sixty feet higher than where Peter stood. Its roof was as high as the roof of rock directly

over his head. He saw the intersecting cave as an enormous black hole high up in the side of the wall.

Evidently the creek had in former ages jumped down through that black, high hole out of the intersecting ravine into that from which the young pioneer looked up. He could see the discoloration left by flowing water on the now dry wall of rock.

He could see how the ancient creek, coming out as from a roofed aisle, had descended in two steps, the lower about twenty, the upper about forty feet in height. Even when the lightning flashed he could see nothing beyond the upper step. There absolute darkness was back of the outline of the high hole in the wall.

Peter turned to look at the pond's left or north bank. There the precipice which formed the cave's wall rose apparently straight up out of the water.

The boy stood on the right or south side of the pond on the edge of a bank about one hundred and twenty feet wide, which sloped gently to the foot of the wall out of which the creek had formerly jumped down.

After staring round till he had seen all this, Peter ran, as if alarmed by the solemnity of the cave, straight to the tall fissure, which gave a dim light to his path. He hoped to get through the crack.

He reached it, hesitated because of its narrowness, then endeavored to force his body through the fissure. Fancy trying to squeeze through between two towering walls of rough-faced stone less than a foot apart! Peter crowded in his head and right shoulder. There he stuck—the crack was too narrow! The length of the passage to the open air seemed about ten feet.

"I'd need to be rolled out like one of mother's lard cakes," said Peter as he drew back, faced the fissure and stood gazing at the open outside, so near and so unattainable.

The light from the free, outer world nerved and encouraged him. He was so much a boy of action that the dangers he had passed were scarcely present to his recollection. Nor did he yet wholly comprehend the danger in which he stood.

His main thought was that his people were homeless; that his poor mother was in the net-

house, perhaps dying; that he must get to her; that freedom was within ten feet of him, and that he would somehow find or force a way out.

"If I had that surveyor chap to help," said Peter aloud, and looked back to the cascade.

Would Vincent Bracy come through? Peter looked back at the dim cascade falling as from a narrow, high gothic window. The stream down which he had come filled the whole width of the aperture. It fell as unbroken as from the end of a flume. Peter could, when the lightning flashed, see a little of the sloping surface of the swift, smooth chute that had borne him away from his comrade of the night of fire.

While wondering whether Vincent would tumble over the cascade, Peter resumed his study of the interior.

A few yards north of him, and to the left side of the fissure, the pond narrowed to the ordinary width of the creek. There the stream turned, like an obtuse-angled elbow-joint, to the left, and flowed gently on into complete darkness.

Out of this darkness as if from far away

came a strange gurgling and washing of water, intermingled with a sound like *cloop — cloop — cloop* — such as water often makes when flowing a-whirl out of the bottom of a basin beneath a tap. At first the boy was almost terrified by the sound, — it so much resembled the gulpings of some enormous animal. But soon his fears departed and hope rose high, for he bethought him that the noise must be that of escaping water.

Not even by the lightning flashes could Peter see down the corridor into which the creek thus turned, and ran, and *clooped*. All that he could make out was that this corridor or ravine was nearly on a line with the higher-floored ravine out of which the creek had jumped in ancient days.

The three corridors, that in which the pond lay, that down which the dry, high old channel came from the south, and that into which the creek ran on a northerly course, did not connect exactly at right angles. They were all roofed at, apparently, pretty much the same height as the chute which terminated in the cascade down which Peter had tumbled.

The stream which had poured for ages into

the cave, by either the old or the new channel, could never have had a sufficient exit in flood time. From the hue of the walls up to a line some fifteen feet above where Peter stood, the water seemed to have accumulated often in the cave, swept round and round, and at the same time discharged part of its volume through the narrow fissure.

Peter's curiosity to know the cause of that strange *cloop* — *cloop* was strong, but not strong enough to lead him along the wall in the dark to what might prove another voyage down a slide and a cascade. But he determined to make the exploration by torchlight.

The sloping floor of the covered ravine's right bank, on which Peter stood, was littered with driftwood. As he searched among it for cedar, the easiest of woods to split with the hunting-knife he still carried, he noticed some entire but small trunks of trees. Then it came into his mind that he might escape by the old dry channel, if only he could find a pole long enough to help him up the forty-feet-high wall he could see behind the lower step of twenty feet.

It is necessary to understand clearly the aspect which the old channel presented to the boy. Conceive, then, a church door forty feet wide and two hundred feet high. Conceive the door to be as wide as the corridor into which it offered an opening. Conceive two steps, the lower of twenty, the upper of forty feet in height, barring you from entering the corridor. Thus did the old channel, its mouth shining high and black above Peter, step up from the cave where he stood. He determined to reach that high up old channel if possible, for he believed it would give him a passage to the open air.

His search for a long pole was rewarded, after he had built a bright fire of cedar. Its smoke drifted in various directions for awhile, some going up the old channel, some down towards the passage whence the *cloop*—*cloop* came. But the greater cloud, which soon drew all the smoke with it, went out of the hole in the roof at the top of the narrow fissure.

The young pioneer found a tall cedar, perfectly dry, for the cavern was not damp. With little difficulty he ascended the lower or twenty-feet-



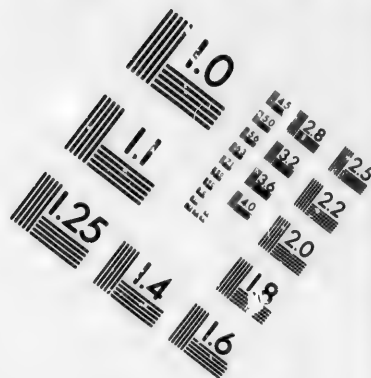
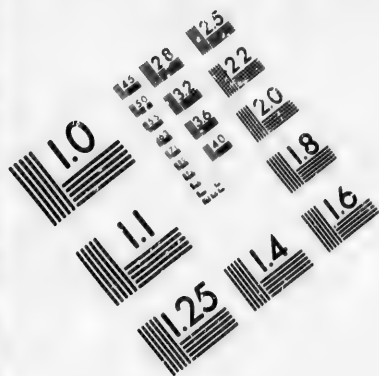
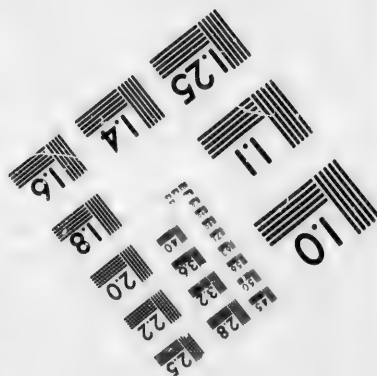
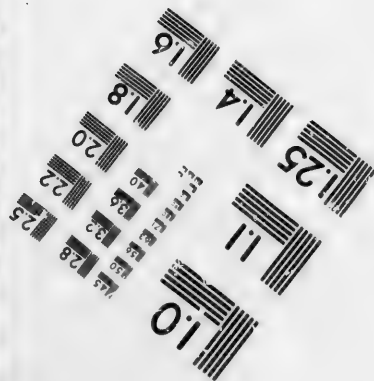
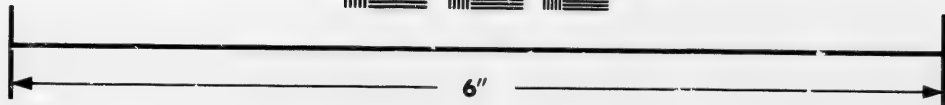
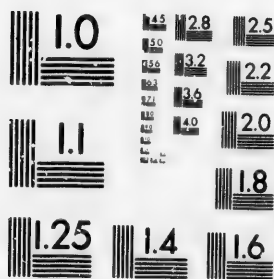


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high step of the old channel. All the bark had been torn from his cedar as it came down the rapids in flood time, but short bits of the branches remained. These assisted him to climb.

He had reached the top of the first step, and nearly hauled the cedar up after him when he bethought him that a torch would be needed after he should have attained the top of the next or forty-feet-high step.

So Peter descended and split a bundle of cedar. While engaged at this work he thought he heard, as from far away, sounds as of snarling and yelling wild beasts. He listened with cold creeping over his skin. Were wild beasts coming toward him?

But the sounds ceased. He doubted whether his ears had not deceived him. Only the swishing of the wind away off in the old channel had, he hoped, reached him. Yet he felt the edge and point of his hunting-knife after he had drawn himself again up the lower ledge.

Soon he had dragged his pole to the upper step. It was barely long enough to reach the top. Piling many broken rocks that he found

strewn there around the foot of the pole to hold it steady, he soon had his head above the upper ledge. Lifting himself by his hands and elbows, he stood joyfully on the floor of the high intersecting ravine. Sixty feet below him lay the floor of the main cave, the pond into and out of which the creek flowed, and the dying fire that he had built of driftwood.

Peter whirled the small torch that he had carried as he climbed. From it he lit another, and went bravely ahead. For a hundred yards the floor of the ancient channel was of gravel, sand, and bits of fallen rock. His torches showed him nothing more except the towering and jagged walls. He wondered what stealthy creatures, far up there in the blackness of darkness, might not be watching him. But trusting his torches to scare away any wolves or bears that the forest fire might have driven into the cavern, he went boldly on. Thunder rolled more frequently, but he could no longer see ahead of him by the lightning flashes which had illuminated the main ravine that he had left.

When Peter stopped he stopped with a cry of despair. The passage was blocked by

enormous masses of rock. The foot of the pile was of pieces that he could climb over for some forty feet. But there the pile, consisting of fragments as high as small houses, towered up without any visible end into the blackness above.

It was plain that part of the roof of the ravine had fallen in, ages and ages before. Peter could see high enough to understand that his pole was useless here. Hope went out of his heart as he sat down and contemplated the enormous confusion which blocked his way.

He seemed to see himself away off in the clearing by the Brazeau and here in the darkness at the same time. He seemed to see the eyes of them all at home staring from infinite distance at him lost in the barred ravine.

Then the events of the yesterday came to his mind with full force. He fancied the fire sweeping through the forest toward his mother's home—he fancied the destruction of the cabin and the precious barn! At the thought of his mother lying—was she dead?—in the root-house, Peter's despair for her roused him from despair for himself.

"I must see mother again. I must! I will!" he thought, and remembered again the *cloop*—*clooping* sound in the main cave.

"Where the creek gets out I can get out," he said, with new hope, and returned with difficulty down his pole to the lower floor of the vault. Now his fire of light wood had quite died out. To renew it was his first care. Then, going again to the fissure, he stood by it, pondering whether he could not get through. He bethought him of how he had seen boulders broken by building a fire round them. They sometimes fell apart on cooling. Could he not reasonably expect that a fire built in the fissure would cause its sides to scale off and afford him the little more space needed to give him escape.

But time? The plan would occupy days. How could he live in the meantime?

Peter went inquisitively to the pond and looked in. He whirled his torch close to the water. What he saw must have pleased him, for he actually laughed and felt in his trousers pocket with a look of satisfaction. His hook and line were still there.

But first he would ascertain where the creek

went out of the cave. The place was not far away. He soon was standing by the one singular feature of his prison. Other caves have intersecting vaults far more amazing than those that were above and around him. But perhaps no body of water elsewhere has so strange an escape as that by which Lost Creek goes its way to the Brazeau.

Where the end of the north-going ravine stopped short, the creek, after gliding smoothly down the south edge of a truly circular basin, ran whirling around and down as straight as if into a perpendicular pipe. The water, ridged and streaked with bubbles as it circled into the funnel, was clearly illuminated at the bottom.

The stream went down like water out of a basin under a tap. It might drop ten, twenty, or a hundred feet, Peter thought, but light certainly struck into it not very far below.

As the water gurgled and swashed around and around, a sucking sound sometimes was followed by the *cloop—cloop—cloop* that had first caught his attention.

"I can go down there," thought Peter; "go down fast enough — that's sure."

He threw in a piece of driftwood. It stood on end and was out of sight in an instant.

"Should I get tore up?" thought Peter. "Or should I fall far enough to get smashed on the bottom? There's plenty of room—it's fifteen feet acrost at the funnel. But I guess I'd better explore all around before I risk my life in such a whirling hole."

He returned along the high tunnel to the main cave. Again he stopped at the fissure. Blackness, merely punctuated by his fire, was behind him and in that great darkness was no sound save the hoarse voice of the cascade.

Standing at the fissure his sense of imprisonment deepened as he turned from the vastness, gloom, and roar of the huge vault behind him to gaze at the free and flying clouds. Inward draughts of air brought him the smell of freshly wet earth. Heavy rain slanted along, scurrying into mist on a rocky hillside opposite his jail. Poplar-trees bent and thrashed there under mighty gusts of wind.

As the boy thought of the burning woods and the parched country and his father's clearing, he blessed the Lord for the swift rain that his

mother had prayed for so often. He could hear her, he fancied, as he fell into the reverie that such rain commonly gives — he could hear his mother's piteous prayer, as if the woe of it were compelling the rain to descend.

Then he exulted in the fresh breeze and the drops that were blown to his face. That joy vanished as he turned to the pouring echo of his prison. Now he could not see, but only hear the cascade, so dim had the cave become by the cessation of lightning and the darkening of the hole in the roof. Night was closing in upon the outer world, and uttermost darkness succeeded.

But Peter's fire soon burned hugely. After he had busied himself at the water's edge for half an hour he heaped up piles of driftwood by the light of the flame. Between the throwing down and going forth for more wood he stood listening and looking into the high portal of the south, or old channel ravine.

Peter thought as the night went on that he heard again the sounds of wild animals that he had fancied before. Were fierce eyes glaring at him from the great pile of fallen rocks that had barred him from escape? Were soft feet

sheathing cruel claws coming silently toward him?

The night drew on toward dawn, and intenser darkness prevailed in the cave. At longer intervals thunder rattled through the cavern. The lightning that had preceded might have revealed, to any eye looking down from the hole in the cave's gable, the figure of a boy sleeping in the space between four guardian fires that slowly waned to smouldering brands.

The eye looking down would also have seen the water of a rapidly rising creek lapping on the coals of the most northerly fire, and sizzling as it extinguished them. Still Peter Armstrong slept profoundly. He had not reckoned that the rain now pouring down outside, would raise the water in the cave.

Inch by inch its level ascended. Soon the brands of the extinguished fire were afloat and drifting toward the whirlpool. Even when the water had encroached upon the two fires further in, the boy still slept. His cowhide boots were lapped by the rising flood, and yet he lay quiet as a log.

Down from the cascade poured a larger vol-

ume. Driftwood came tumbling with it. Lost Creek was in half flood with the steady and great rain. No longer could the *cloop* — *cloop* have been heard by any one in the cave, for the funnel was gorged too full.

By morning neither flame nor coal of Peter's fires could have been seen from above. Nor was there any sign of Peter Armstrong near the dispersed ashes of those inner fires that had not been overflowed by the rising stream. The cave's floor was nearly covered by a tumult of whirling water, and no sign of Peter's tenancy remained except the relics of his trout supper and the ashes and dead brands of the most inward of the fires that he had built to guard his life from the wild beasts of the cavern.

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CHAPTER VI.

VINCENT DOWN THE CHUTE.

AT noon on the third day, long before Mrs. Armstrong had received Vincent Bracy's letter, Vincent stood, with one man, at the place where Peter had disappeared. Both carried camp lanterns with reflectors.

"Grosbois," said Vincent, "the creek has risen a good deal here since yesterday."

"Yesseh! *Baptême* — it's de rain."

"Do you hear that pouring sound?"

"Yesseh — dass a fall down dere, 'way far. Can't be ver' high — no sir, not ver' big fall."

"No. I dare say the chute runs into deep water. That would account for the sound, eh?"

"Mebby. I don't know, sir, for sure."

"How would you like to go down?"

"*Sapree!* Not for all de money in de *Banque du Peuple*."

Vincent had brought ten men with him from

camp. Eight were now at the Brazeau end of the cave looking for the longest tree they could hope to carry into the curved ravine.

Early in the morning they had found the channel by which Lost Creek discharged from the cave to the Brazeau. Looking into an irregularly-walled, tunnel-like passage about twenty feet high, they saw how the water came whirling down straight from the *clooping* funnel that Peter had seen from inside the cave.

After dropping into a deep, narrow basin it spread wide and shallow over the level rock where the search party were, gathered again into a narrow brook, and prattled on gently to the Big Brazeau River, a quarter of a mile distant.

It seemed clear to them that Peter's body, if he had been carried down the funnel, would have been found on the shallows, where sticks that had descended were widely strown. Between and under these sticks the water ran. Vincent's inference that Peter had not been carried down but was alive within the cave looked reasonable.

He took his men into the passage whence he had escaped, and soon found the south side

of the enormous barrier of fallen rocks whose north side had blocked Peter's way out the day before. They stood opposite where Peter had stood, and found that end as impracticable as he had found the other.

Vincent sent one man to camp with a note to the chief engineer. With himself he kept old Grosbois. He ordered the eight others to ascend the Hump, cut down one of the tallest pines growing there, and wait for the chief engineer to arrive with ropes and the rest of the men, twenty-two in number. Then he and Grosbois walked away through the cave to the upper entrance with the two camp lanterns.

An hour passed. The men had felled a great tree, and it lay stripped on the upper plateau. After clearing away the branches the gang found they could not stir the trunk. They went below to the cave that they might gain shelter from the incessant rain. There they lighted a fire and waited.

Another hour passed. Grosbois now sat with his comrades by the fire. He had returned to the party without Vincent Bracy. Sometimes the superstitious men turned their heads and

peered into the blackness of the cave. They half-expected to see Vincent's ghost coming toward them.

Another hour had nearly passed when the chief engineer and his twenty-two men came into the cave from the Brazeau side.

"Where's Mr. Bracy?" cried the chief.

"Ah, M'sien, Mr. Bracy's gone," said Grosbois, almost crying.

"Gone?"

"Yesseh — gone for sure."

"Gone where?"

"Down de chute."

"What chute?"

"Down where he see dat boy go yesterday — de boy what he's tell us about last night."

"You are out of your senses, Grosbois."

"No, sir, I hain't out of no senses — for sure, I wish I was. But I'll toll de trut'. Mr. Bracy he's say to me, 'Mebby Peter is starved before we find him.' He say, 'Mebby we don't get up in dere all day, mebby not all to-morrow.' He's say, 'Mebby dere hain't no way to get to de boy except only one way.'"

"Go on — what did he do?"

"He make me help him for cut off a big chunk off one hollow cedar. He put his hax in de hollow, an' he put in a piece of rope, and some pork and biscuit, and he put in his pistol, and 'is lantern. Den he plug up de two end. An' he say to me, 'Grosbois, you tell 'em to keep climbing up de ole channel back dere. Good-bye, Grosbois,'—and dat's all."

"But where did he go?"

"M'sieu, in two seconds he's away down de black chute!"

"In the water?"

"Yessseh, in de water—straddle on de log."

"Vincent must have gone crazy."

"He hain't *look* crazy," said Grosbois. "He's look like he's see something bad what hain't scare him one bit. He's say, 'Good-bye, Grosbois,' an' he's make me a bow same as he's always polite, and he's smile, easy, easy. Den's he's roll his log in before I b'leeve he's goin' to be so wild, and I don't see him no more."

"Up with you—up for the tree!" cried the chief. "Not you, Grosbois—all the rest. Grosbois, you go down to the outlet and watch

for the body. Little Vincent Bracy! My life and soul — what will his father say!"

The party were climbing the hill by various paths to get the long tree when one of them stopped, held up his hand, and looked round fearfully at those nearest him."

"I hear Mr. Bracy's ghost," he said.

The startled men stood still, listening. All now heard the faint call. As from the bowels of the earth the cry floated up:—

"*Hello! Hello! Hello!*"

"He's alive, wherever he is," cried the chief, arriving. "He's shouting in the hope he'll be heard. Hello! Bracy! Vincent! Hello!"

Still Vincent's voice ascended monotonously. "*Hello! Hello! Hello!*" at intervals of some seconds.

"Yell all together!" cried the chief to the men, who were coming from all directions. They shouted and listened again. And again the far voice cried, "*Hello! Hello!*" with the same tones and intervals as before.

"It's from over there. And there's smoke coming up," said one.

They approached the edge of the plateau and

looked down — down the hole that Peter had seen high up — the hole in which the tall fissure ended.

"Why, here is smoke. And here's a hole," cried the chief, getting down on his hands and knees. "He must be down here. Yes! Vincent! Hello!"

"Hello yourself, chief!"

"You're alive then?"

"Yes, sir. All alive."

"Hurt?"

"No — as sound as a nut."

"Had a rough passage?"

"Pretty rough, sir. But I'm not hurt."

Down by a bright fire they saw Vincent Bracy standing alone. He looked up at the faces crowding round the hole in which the fissure terminated.

"Have you the ropes there?" he shouted.

"Go down for the ropes," cried the chief engineer, and away went four men.

"Rope is coming, Vincent. Keep your heart up."

"Oh, I'm all right, sir."

"Where's the Armstrong boy?"

"Gone. He was here this morning."

"How do you know?"

"The rock under his dead fire was quite warm."

"Where's he gone? Have the bears got him?"

"No sign of it."

"What's become of him, then?"

"I fancy he went down the creek before the water rose in here."

"But you saw no sign of him down there?"

"Better send Grosbois to look for his trail, sir. Perhaps he got out alive."

"Grosbois is down there now."

"Hey, Grosbois! Grosbois!" shouted the chief. But no answer came. Grosbois had gone out of hearing.

"Is the water rising, Vincent?"

"Yes. It's risen three inches since I got here."

The pond within the cave now presented the aspect of a stream incessantly returning on itself by an eddy up one bank and a current down the other.

Vincent could not reach the fissure without

wading. From that crack flowed a rivulet a foot deep. No sound except the surging of a whirlpool came from the corridor where Peter had heard the *cloop* — *clooping* sound.

"Young Armstrong must have been starving!" shouted the chief.

"No, sir. He seems to have lived on the fat of the water."

"Fat of the water?"

"Yes; trout. Look here!" Vincent held up two fish.

"How could he catch them?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But he certainly did. The place is all heads and tails. I shouldn't have supposed any fellow could eat so many trout in the time. He was here only a day altogether."

"Can you get straight under this hole, Vincent?"

"Yes. I waded down to the crack a while ago."

"Well, the ropes are coming."

Vincent waded down the fissure and stood. In the course of half an hour the rope had descended, Vincent had placed the loop under

his shoulders, and the exulting men had drawn him safely up. Then the whole party walked down to the whirling outlet.

"It's impossible young Armstrong could have come through here alive," said the chief, looking into the tunnel out of which the rising water rushed.

"There wasn't so big a volume this morning early when we were here before," said Vincent. "And Peter must have come down before that."

"You seem very sure he did come down."

"Well, sir, so I am. It's what I should have done myself in the circumstances. I was beginning to think of it when you answered my call."

"Lucky you didn't. Perhaps you are right. But it's surprising that he took the risk when he had plenty to eat."

"You forget how alarmed he was about his mother. Besides, he probably thought I had been lost, and he had no hope of a rescue."

"But what can have become of him if he got out here?"

"He would make for home up the river."

"Well, I hope your theory is sound," said the

chief. "What's become of Grosbois, I wonder? Grosbois! Grosbois!" he shouted.

But Grosbois was far away, following what he thought a trail through the woods. It took him up the river. Meantime another voyageur had picked up the trail of Grosbois and brought the news back to the chief.

"He must have found Peter or his track," said Vincent. "I'll follow, too, sir, if you'll allow me. I have to go to Kelly's Crossing, anyway, and I may as well try to get to the Armstrongs' to-night."

About three o'clock that afternoon Mary Armstrong was giving Eliza Jane and Ann Susan a "piece." She stood with her back to the cabin door, when Ann Susan suddenly cried, "Peter! Peter!" and held out her hands.

"Peter's here!" cried Eliza Jane, coolly.

Mary turned. Peter, indeed, staggered up the path. His face was covered with dry blood from many scratches, his shirt and trousers were in strips, his feet bare and bleeding.

"Mother! It *is* Peter! Peter's come back! He's not dead at all," cried Mary, running out into her brother's arms.

Mrs. Armstrong tottered to her feet.

"Is mother dead? Where is she?" cried Peter, as he caught sight of Mary.

"Why, mother! Ain't you glad to see me?" he said, holding her in his arms a minute later. She was weeping as she clung to him.

"Oh Peter, Peter, Peter, I thought you was burned to death!" was all she could say.

"There, mother! there, mother! I'm all right. Only tore up a little, running through the woods. I've been travellin' since daylight, and I lost my boots out of my hand coming down a whirlpool out of a cave, and I couldn't find them amongst the driftwood below. I was in too big a hurry. I was most scared to death for fear you wouldn't be here. My! it was good to see the barn and house standin'. I come up along the river till about two hours ago. Then I worked up top of the Hump for easier walkin'. Where's father?"

"A boy came for him. He went down river two hours ago to look for you."

"I'd have met him, then, if I'd kept straight on. Maybe he'd miss my track up the Hump."

But the father had not missed it, for he had

met Grosbois, who held to Peter's trail like a hound to the slot of a deer. Scarcely had the boy entered the cabin when David Armstrong and the voyageur came down the Hump's side. The father, swept by his emotion beyond self-control, caught Peter in his arms.

"God — God — oh God," cried Dave Armstrong, "you've give me back my boy. Oh God, just see if I ain't a better man from this out."

Eliza Jane and Ann Susan roared, weeping at the top of their lungs because mother and Mary were crying, and father talking so loudly.

Ann Susan, stopping suddenly, said decidedly, "I yant Pete!"

"Peter's dead, and he's come back," said Eliza Jane.

"Take them, Peter," said the mother; "take them. They've been hankering after you most as bad as me."

He lifted the little ones in his arms. They drew back from his dirty and bloody face. Peter laughed.

"Mother," said he, "I didn't fetch you your tea."

"That young Mr. Bracy sent some up by the messenger, Peter."

"Mr. Bracy? oh, Vincent," said Peter. "He got out of the cave, then? I was planning to start back and find him!"

"Guess what this man says he did this morning, Peter," said the pioneer, turning to Grosbois. "He went down that chute in the cave after you."

"Yessseh, I see him myse'f," said Grosbois.

"Well, ain't he a good one!" said Peter. "Why, I wouldn't have gone down there this morning for the price of the hay. The creek was beginning to rise before I went out. But say! Is Vincent lost like I was?"

"No. Just as I started on your trail I heard them yellin' they found him safe," said Grosbois.

Peter had hardly eaten his supper that evening when Vincent arrived.

"Peter!"

"Vincent!" The boys shook hands.

"You went into the chute after me," said Peter, choking. "If it hadn't been for you keepin' me goin', I'd 'a' died in the fire by the creek — so I would, and —"

"Oh, please don't," interrupted Vincent.

"And I'd been abusin' you," said Peter. "I'd said you wa a dood!"

"Deuce you did! Well, I dare say I am. But what matter? It's not really a crime, don't you know. There's just one thing I want you to tell me, Peter. How did you catch those trout in the cave?"

Peter pulled a fish-line with a hook on it from his pocket.

"Forgot I had it for a long time in there," he said. "Don't you mind I said I had a hook and line that time we was kickin' the trout out of the creek?"

"But what bait did you use?"

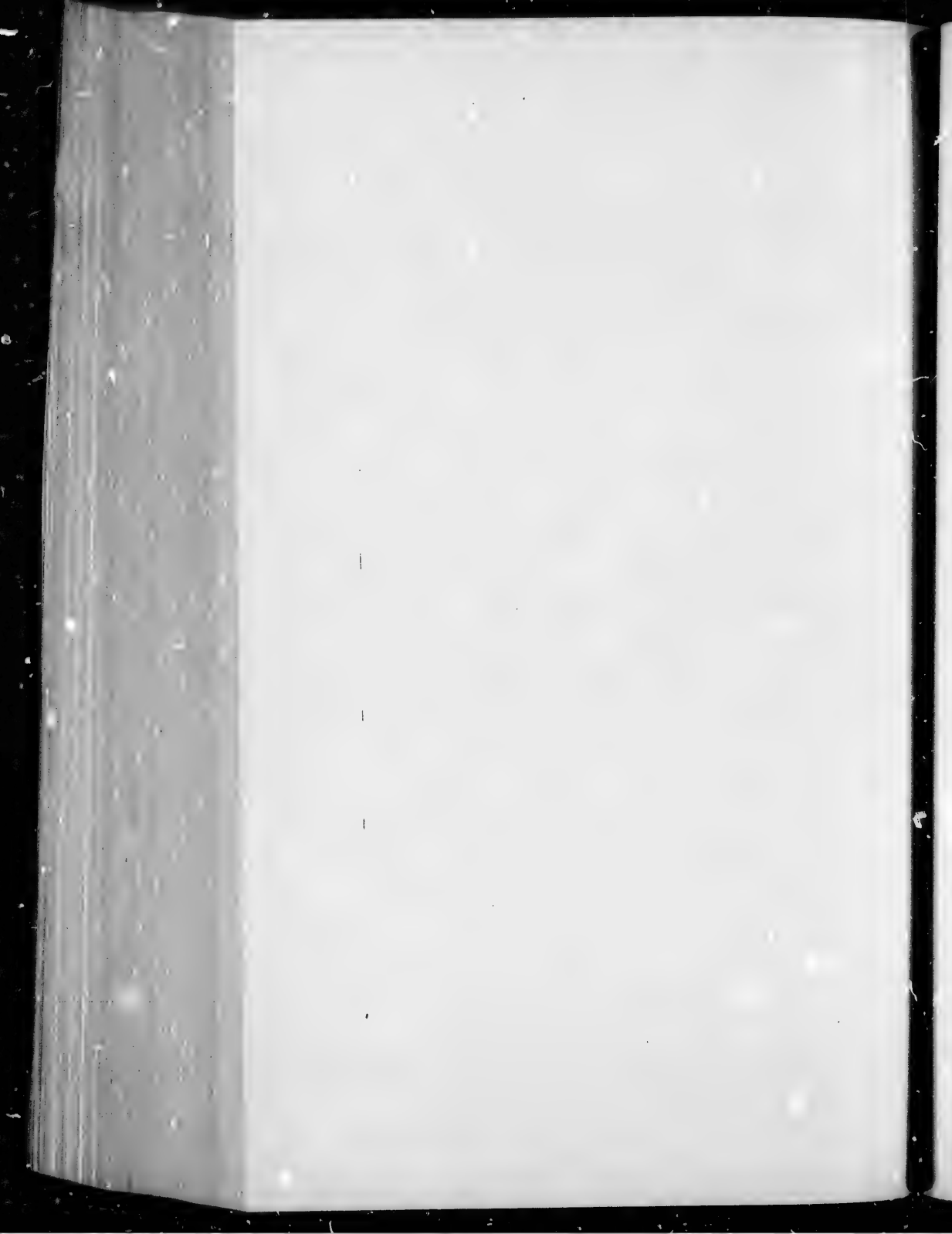
"Bait? They didn't want no better than a bare hook."

You may be glad to learn that David Armstrong's hay sold for ninety dollars a ton that winter. The comfortable situation into which this put the pioneer family gave Mrs. Armstrong a new lease of life, and Peter three winters' schooling in the settlements. There he learned so much that he is able to transact the business of the large lumbering interest which he has long since acquired.

Peter Armstrong is worth ten thousand dollars to Vincent Bracy's one. but they are fast friends, and agree that Mr. Bracy's comparative lack of fortune is due to his having practised a profession instead of going into business.

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DRIFTED AWAY.

CHAPTER I.

LOST.

ABOUT five o'clock in the afternoon of a raw March day the report ran about Toronto that two boys in a skiff, without oars, paddles, or sail, were being blown out in the open lake. This alarm originated with a butcher who had driven into town along the shore of Ontario from the mouth of the Humber River, some four miles westward of Toronto Bay.

A keen though not a great wind prevailed that afternoon. Navigation had scarcely begun, hence it was almost certain that no incoming vessel would pick the boys up. The probability that they could be found before nightfall by a tug seemed small. Only one Toronto tug had steam up, and that little vessel would not

return till nightfall from its work at a long distance from the wharves.

Scarcely had the report begun to travel by word of mouth before an evening paper distributed it broadcast. Home-going business men, leaving their offices to shoulder through the evening throng, heard newsboys calling, "All about the boys adrift!"

The gas-lamps just then being lighted seemed to accentuate Kings Street's cheerful bustle, and so impress people more distinctly with a sense of the quick spread of night over the face of the waters on which the two lads were helplessly floating away. Toronto people are so familiar with the lake that thousands had instantly grasped the full significance of the rumor.

In a few minutes it roused something like a panic. Groups formed round men who talked loudly of the chances of rescue; women hysterically inquired the names of the boys; cries of sympathy went up from persons who, on coming out of stores, suddenly learned of the case. The imminence of darkness forbade confidence that the boys could be found alive, and the

meagreness of information left a multitude of parents to fear for sons they had not seen during the day.

By six o'clock a great crowd had formed on and about Brown's wharf, where the tug *A. G. Nixon* was almost ready to start. As she whistled, a cheer went up, which was understood by the people farther back, caught, passed on, and echoed to and fro and sidelong and far away up many an avenue. At that, factory operatives pouring into the streets and home-stayers who had not yet heard of the thing stopped, or rushed out to question what was the matter.

Just as the *Nixon* was about to leave, a man running down the middle of Yonge Street into the crowd cried:—

"Stand aside and let me past! One of them is my little boy!"

So quickly did the people push sidewise to give Mr. Lancely room that three men were thrust off the slip into the water. At this the scared crowd struggled to get back off the wharf to firm land, and the general attention was distracted from the boat till the three men were

pulled out. By this time the *Nixon*, with Mr. Lancely aboard, had started.

Before she left the slip he had explained from her deck that his son, nine years old, and his servant-boy, perhaps seventeen, were certainly those adrift.

"He's the only child we have left," said the gentleman. "I want somebody to go out to my house. Take a cab and hurry. Tell my wife that I've started with the tug, and we're sure to catch the skiff soon. Say *sure* to, mind that, sure to, or she'll die of anxiety."

"All right, Lancely. I'll go myself!" cried an acquaintance. "Keep your heart up. You'll find Charley all right, poor little chap!"

At that there was a cheer from the people, and the throng began to break up; but many persons remained on the wharf to see the *Nixon* make her way out through the floating ice-cakes that still swung to and fro in the harbor. As the tug passed beyond the western gap a cloud of snow drove forth from the land, blotting her out at a breath.

"God help the poor boys! God help them!" said some man in an earnest tone, and the

prayer and the emotion went up, repeated from many lips. Meantime the captain of the tug was questioning the anxious father.

"Will they have plenty of clothes on, Mr. Lancely?" asked the *Nixon's* skipper.

"I don't know. All I know is in this telegram that a strict telegraph boy handed to me just as I was preparing to go home:—

"Charley and Isidore are adrift in the skiff without oars. I can see them floating out about half-way between the island and the Humber. Act quickly. No one here can suggest anything except to send out a tug."

"That's from my wife," said Mr. Lancely. "I instantly ran down and found your boat starting. No, I can't imagine how they got adrift, though this morning I told Isidore—he's my servant-boy—to loosen a strip of carpet that runs the length of the skiff. It got frozen down at the stern last fall because I forgot to bale her out. Isidore is very fond of my little boy, so I suppose they went together to the boat-house and somehow got afloat and were blown out. How long before we shall catch up to them, captain?"

The skipper looked gravely at him, glanced

at the northern sky, and replied, "Well, sir, we will likely make out to reach them if the wind don't change or something worse happen."

"Surely the wind won't change!"

"No, I don't say it will. I'll do my best, you may lay to that, sir. What I'm most afeard of is that the little fellow will be done out with cold. Would he likely have his overcoat on?"

"I'm afraid not. He's fond of going round without it, no matter what we tell him."

"Boys is all like that, sir."

"Still he may have had it with him, for Isidore is very careful of Charley. If not, he'll be half-frozen, and have a frightful cold."

"What about the servant-boy? Would he likely be well covered?"

"No, poor fellow. He has a big, warm old overcoat of mine, but he's almost too proud of it to wear it. He never had a whole coat before, and it's altogether likely he went to the boat-house without it on."

"Pretty bad, pretty bad, sir. I'll see and have some blankets put over the boiler to heat, and they'll be ready in case we find 'em."

"In case! Surely, you don't doubt that, captain?"

"Oh, we're bound to find them, bound to find them. But when? There's no telling how the currents will act round this part of the lake. Hey! No finding 'em if we can't see the surface of the water! Consarn it all, here's what I was afraid of!"

At the word a coming cloud of snow hid the land and the lights ashore.

When the snow had cleared away, the tug, steaming slowly with the wind, was far from land. Soon afterward the straggling clouds blew away, leaving over the sullen expanse of Ontario a moonless, starlit vault. Low on the north horizon a light-house dwindled. Nothing but the sighing wind, not gale enough to rouse a tumbling sea, could be heard responding to the long shrieks of steam with which the *Nixon* strove to let the boys know she was seeking them.

"That will hearten them up, anyhow," said the captain.

As the tug "teetered" up and down the scarcely broken swell, Mr. Lancel in the bow

gazed steadily forward, around and down. Often he thought he saw the skiff rising upon some shouldering billow, but ever the lapse of the roller renewed his increasing fear. Once the bow struck some heavy thing. His heart fell at the sudden contact. He sprang to look over, expecting to see the skiff; but before he had fairly peered down, the grinding sound betokened a cake of ice.

Once, after abandoning the idea that he had darkly seen the skiff on a wave, a thought that it perhaps had been there grew to an overpowering fear that they were leaving Charley astern. The pitying captain backed up then, and ran to and fro over the adjacent water. Then the wretched father groaned with self-reproach for having caused the loss of time.

"Could the skiff swamp in this sea?" he asked.

"No, that's not likely. There's scarcely a break of water anywhere, and she'd drift easy. Do you suppose that servant-boy of yours would know enough to rig up any kind of a sail? But I forgot; they'd nothing to rig one with. So I reckon we're all right."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we'll be more likely to find her than we would if she was sailing instead of just drifting. She can only go straight ahead and we'd ought to find her."

After the tug had run out to about where the captain thought the boat should be, he headed due east, kept that course for some two miles, and then went back and forth, east and west, steaming south or with the wind a few minutes upon each turn. Thus the little steamer described many long, narrow parallelograms on the surface of the lake, but the skiff of the lost boys was not seen.

So the evening passed, and the depths of darkness drew on. It was after midnight when the skipper, pointing to the north, shouted with joy.

"Where? Show me!" cried Mr. Lancely. "I can't see them! Where? Do you see the skiff?"

"No, sir, I didn't mean that. But see! Yonder! There's more help coming!"

Away off toward Toronto a light gleamed; then another and another, five in all.

"Five more tugs! Good boys!" cried the captain. "Hurrah, now we can do something!"

Across the intervening league a dull bass note came with the wind.

"It's the commodore's steam yacht," said the skipper. Soon the little vessels were all within hail.

"Lancelly!" shouted the bluff old commodore of the Yacht Club. "When we left, there was word from your house that your wife was bearing up well."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

"I thought you'd be anxious, old man, and so I telegraphed for news of her while steam was getting up. Now we're going to find Charley pretty soon, I hope," and he rapidly explained his plan to the *Nixon's* skipper.

Soon the little steamers were systematically ranging to and fro, passing and repassing, over a tract some five miles wide, whistling in unison every fifth minute by the watch, that the hoped-for replies of the boys might be heard in still intervals.

But the night seemed to thicken till far toward morning, when a thin moon came up

over the waste. The constellation of the Great Bear wheeled high and far past the Pole, the wind slowly fell, and the solemnity of the face of the waters deepened in the hush, while still the searching father gazed from the bow, praying dumbly to see again the flaxen head and bold blue eyes of his little son.

Mr. Lancely's boat-house could be seen from the upper windows of his suburban residence at three hundred yards' distance. The house stood far back in a garden-orchard separated from the shore by the highway to the Humber, and by the Great Western Railway track which runs along the lake shore for miles.

Mrs. Lancely had been sitting in the afternoon beside her bedroom window knitting a long stocking for Charley, when she bethought her that she had not heard his voice for an unusually long time. Where was he?

Safe with Isidore of course; perhaps searching the hay-mow for eggs, perhaps giving the tall French boy one more exposition of the great truth that little *d* should always be recog-

nized by its peculiarity of becoming little *p* when turned upside down.

Scarcely had her mind formed that picture when it was replaced by a vision of Isidore as she had first seen him. He had come up the St. Lawrence as stowaway and been, as he said, booted ashore at Toronto, where he soon found himself worse off than in his native poverty.

The police, he said, had "tried to catch him," he didn't know why. The city boys had "piled onto him." Everybody said, "Get out of that, Frenchy," when he asked for a job. He had obtained some meals at the soup kitchen; but on the whole, he could not remember how he had lived throughout the terrible months before Charley found him devouring broken meat set out in the woodshed for the absent dog.

"Hello, that's for Bruno!" said Charley, coming round the corner of the house.

The little boy had never before seen such a tatterdemalion, but he was not at all afraid. Indeed, Charley never seemed to know fear. In that bullet-headed, fair-haired, clear-eyed

young Saxon there was a rare assumption that all living creatures would behave amiably. His self-confidence was perfect; the sourest dogs yielded to his patronage at sight. This Loy was at once easy, imperative, and kind.

"I suppose you didn't have your dinner," said he to Isidore at that first meeting; "but you oughtn't to take Bruno's. Wait till I come back."

Isidore put back the pieces as if without any alternative but to obey this young commander, who soon returned with permission to bring the ragamuffin into the kitchen and have him fed.

So, then, Isidore had his first good meal in Toronto, and with that began his employment by the Lancelys. Since that time, two years before, he had been a treasure of obedience, industry, and gratitude to them all. But Charley was his hero, his general, his schoolmaster, his earthly saviour, the very lamp of his life and soul.

Mrs. Lancely, turning again to the window, saw a man clamber up the ridge of earth which separates the highway from the shore, and

point out something on the sullen expanse of Lake Ontario to others who came after him. Her eyes were not good enough to see that they gazed at anything except water almost unbroken by whitecaps, and rolling away to the gray of the southern horizon.

She called on her house-maid to bring her the field-glass from down-stairs. Then she clearly made out her husband's boat lifting and dipping far away. She clearly saw Isidore waving his cap, and Charley floating out his white handkerchief for aid.

Aid! She could give them none. The nearest boats were either in front of the city, fully two miles away in one direction, or at the Humber River mouth, as far distant in the other. Her impulse was to run down into the lake rather than stand idly watching that lessening boat.

Then she remembered that she could communicate with her husband from the suburban telegraph station. When she had sent the despatch and nothing remained to be done, she again took her stand at the window.

Through a cold opaline light the boat wavered

away. The snow-storm passed. Darkness drew on. Some lights faintly twinkled on the long island a mile east of where the boys seemed to be, and still the poor mother fancied she could see Charley waving his speck of white.

No sign, except the trembling clutch of her interwrought fingers, indicated the agony of her strife to maintain sense and calm. All that night she sat there, intensely alive to every sigh of the falling wind, every creak of the trees and of the timbers of the house, every thrill from distant trains that came on and on, bearing crowds of the living across the vague field of her vision, and away out of the deepened silence they left her.

Stars and stars emerged dilating from the horizon; the house grew stiller and chill as the wind died away to a frosty quiet; the galaxies of heaven long wavered on a lake whereon they at last sparkled at rest in unruffled calm; and daylight crept into the welkin. Then the low island's outline slowly separated from the water; tints of amethyst and rose flushed high from the coming sun; glints multiplied and brightened to a wide shine over

the lake, and nowhere on its immense expanse could Mrs. Lancely see a boat or tug.

"Ma'am, dear, you've sat here all night," said Hannah, entering the room.

"Yes," said the mother, in a faint and tranquil voice. "In the night for a long time I thought he must be dead. But he is coming back to me, for God has had my boy in his keeping."

On the south shore of Lake Ontario, near the mouth of Eighteen-mile Creek in the State of New York, a farmer, Elihu Walcott, was up that morning with the sun, when the whistling of steamers away toward the mouth of the Niagara River drew him in curiosity toward the lake shore. Had navigation begun at so early a season? he wondered.

There could be no doubt, at any rate, that six tugs were coming quickly eastward, nearly abreast, and about half a mile apart. The most distant was little more than a smoke to Walcott's eyes. The foremost ran parallel with the shore, well out from the main drift

of ice that had been blown in by the wind of the night.

As the sun rose higher, a light breeze from the east sprang up, and dissipated the little and low mist that had gathered during the short calm before dawn. Walcott saw a row-boat about a mile away to the north. Almost at that moment the two innermost tugs, keeping up a prolonged whistling, ran out for the skiff, upon which the little fleet soon converged.

Walcott kept his eyes fixed on the row-boat. He could see a figure in its middle seat. This figure was motionless. It stooped forward, its breast embraced by its arms, its head bowed over. In that attitude one might sleep.

The innermost tugs, as they neared the skiff, hid her from Walcott. When they slowed they still kept whistling. But before they stopped the steam shrieks ceased.

For a few seconds the air was blank of sound. Then a cheer, which passed from steamer to steamer, came faintly ashore.

Soon afterward Walcott thought he saw two forms carried round the deck-house of one of the tugs. Then the skiff, empty of the figure

he had seen, was hauled upon one of the vessels. After a few silent minutes, during which the crews of all the tugs gathered upon that to which the forms had been brought, this one started northward. The others fell into procession, and all slowly vanished, leaving behind funereal trails of smoke on the horizon.

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CHAPTER II.

FOUND.

MR. LANCELY's boat-house, built on a sloping shore, was in winter hauled farther in and lifted on skids, so that crests blowing off from the surf might not freeze and mass on its end. The skiff's stern then rested against the inside of the outer doors, and would, were these suddenly opened, have run out on the floor rollers till the stern stopped on the gravel.

The boat did not move when Isidore flung open these doors, for he had taken the precaution to tie the painter to an upright in front.

From the boat-house to the water a slope of ice extended. Hence, when Charley, standing in the bow, drew his knife across the cord, the boat instantly started down the slope.

Isidore had been sitting astern, cutting the floor carpet loose from a little ice there. His weight threw the bow up as the stern slid down

to the ice slope, then the skiff slapped over to one side, and before the boys could pick themselves up the boat was in the water. They were afloat, and moving gently outward.

Charley rubbed the back of his head, turned to Isidore, and laughed.

"Hooray!" said Charley.

"Why, I tied her tight!" said Isidore.

"I cut her loose. I never thought," said Charley, seeking his jack-knife.

"There's my overcoat getting wet," said the servant-boy. He and Charley both crawled along to pull the dragging sleeve from the water. Then they sat facing each other on the two middle seats.

"It was like sliding down hill," laughed Charley. "But we can't get back!"

Charley looked around the boat, saw neither oar nor paddle, and measured the distance to shore.

"I could swim it, Isidore," said he.

"No, no, Mr. Charley. The water's too cold. And besides, we can't let the boat go."

She was now moving sidewise before wind and current with some speed. Charley looked

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"Mother! mother!" Charley cried.



up to the house, coming into view above the spruces, and shouted for the servant-girls:—

“Mary! Hannah!”

Isidore joined in; but they could see no one.

“Mary! Hannah!” they cried again.

“There’s Bruno!” said Charley.

The dog ran down to the shore, barked, went into the water, turned back, stood, barked again, ran along the shore as if seeking a better place to enter, came back, stood whining, and then stalked morosely to the house and lay down in his kennel.

“I think I can see my mother at the window,” said Charley, “but she isn’t looking, is she, Isidore?”

“No. How would it do to call to her, Mr. Charley?”

“Mother! mother!” Charley cried. “She doesn’t hear, Isidore. You try.”

“Ma’am! ma’am!” called Isidore.

“Say ‘Mrs. Lancel.’”

But she did not look out, even when they called with the full strength of their lungs and exhausted all their devices for attracting attention. Soon the opacity of the double

windows concealed the faint outline of her head.

"I wish I *had* swum it," said Charley. "It's too far now."

He fell into a strong anxiety for his mother. How often had he promised not to leave home without her permission! Now he was drifting out with a feeling that he was breaking his word.

"Do you s'pose I *could* swim it now?" he asked.

"Mr. Charley! Don't think of that at all. Somebody will see us soon."

"Then they'll come out with the oars." The youngster spoke hopefully.

"The worst is there ain't no other boat," said Isidore. Charley looked blankly along the shore.

"How ever will they get to us?" said he.

"That's what I'm wondering. But they'll come; don't you be a bit afraid."

"I'm not afraid, Isidore. Only my mother will be so anxious! I'm glad she *didn't* see us. I wish my father was home."

"Yes. The master 'ud soon fix it."

"Let us *think*, Isidore. My father always

says that's the way to do in trouble." They stared at one another, determinedly thinking. The more they thought, the more clearly they saw their danger.

"We may go out past the island!" said Charley.

"I'm afraid of that," said Isidore, placing his hand on his "scapulary," a little consecrated leather-covered church medal, tied with string about his neck. He believed it to be a charm against drowning.

"But somebody *must* see us and come!" said Charley, imperiously.

"Oh, somebody will. They's people on the island that has boats."

"Well, that's all right then, Isidore. Only it's getting cold."

"Put my great big coat round you, Mr. Charley. That's right, put your arms in."

"I wish I had my own. You'll be cold yourself," said the little boy, snuggling into the heavy garment.

The fur-lined collar went up over his ears, and the coat wrapped him to the feet as he sat down.

"I tell *you* that's a great coat for warmin' you

up," said Isidore. "Your pa's new overcoat ain't half so heavy."

"He used to have this one for driving, you know, Isidore."

They discussed the garment at such length that Charley quite forgot how Isidore was sacrificing himself. The French boy all the time scanned the shore. Charley kept his eyes fixed pretty steadily on his mother's window.

"Isn't it queer nobody is going round anywhere?" said he.

Out they drifted, past the fortified point that hid Toronto Bay, its wharves and its tied-up, smokeless shipping. Clouds, blown curving down, went out to sea from the city's factory chimneys. On the bay nothing moved, nor could they make out anything back of the wharves except buildings, spires, domes, chimneys pouring smoke, and white puffs from locomotives shunting along the water-front. From the westward a faint rumble grew, and they soon saw the five o'clock train from Hamilton hurry past their homes. Its black trail lay out far over the water, and they could smell the smoky particles after a while.

"Somebody on the island ought to be out looking, but I can't see 'em at all," said Isidore. He stood up and waved his cap and his arms.

Charley, thrusting his head out of the big coat, fluttered his handkerchief; but not a soul seemed astir on the island, then inhabited by a few fishermen. Nor did the light-keeper, who was probably at his supper, see the boat slowly blown away, making westward across the wind with the set of the current.

Gradually the shore spread wide behind them, and endless water loomed on either side. Still the proximity of the island kept the lads in hope. They were newly cheered when a group of indistinguishable figures began to form on the bank behind the boat-house.

"Hurrah, Isidore! They see us now!"

"But what's the good, Mr. Charley!" shivered Isidore, slapping his arms together for warmth. "They can't do anything."

"Somebody'll go and tell my father, anyway. He'll soon come."

He repeated this to himself again and again as the sun sank down behind a low cloud which merged into the trees on a distant shore.

Now the stanch skiff rose and fell over the long rollers a mile west of the island, which gradually dropped lower till it was discernible only as a strip behind which the dim city loomed. As Charley's home dwindled down, his heart grew sorer for his mother. When he could no longer see the house as a speck, he shivered and his lip trembled, but still he looked bravely into Isidore's eyes.

Isidore had wrapped himself now in the long carpet that had covered the bottom of the skiff, but it was neither closely woven nor of the soft texture to keep him warm, and he could not control his teeth from chattering.

"We'd best lie down, Mr. Charley," he said, as the night drew near. "That will keep the wind off us a bit."

"All right, Isidore."

They took the cushions from all the seats and placed them aft of the middle. Charley lay with his head sheltered from the wind by the high back of the stern seat. A small cushion formed his pillow, his back extended along two more, and his feet came within the arms of Isidore, who crouched down and placed

his head against the aft rowing seat and the boat's side.

With this arrangement of their weights, her head rode high and she blew away more quickly. She was a good, steady family boat, twenty-six feet long, and there was no breaking sea to poop her. Occasionally ripples that formed on the big billows splashed and flung drops over the sides near the ballasted stern.

"Aren't you cold, Isidore?"

"I've often been colder than this, Mr. Charley. Don't you mind about me. Keep your head covered, and I'll take care of your feet. Are *you* getting cold?"

"Not very, Isidore. It's nice to have you hold my feet."

The big boy clutched them tighter. His heart swam with love for his little captain. Loosening the front fold of the carpet from beneath his arm, he placed it along Charley's legs, and felt still happier, though the wind cut cruelly against his neck and face. Sometimes he had to move to conceal his convulsions of shivering.

Neither boy spoke for a long time. There

was nothing to say; the desperation of the situation baffled talk. Charley kept thinking steadily of his mother. He seemed to see into her shining eyes. He was, as it were, telling her, "Don't be afraid, mother dear. I will come back, I *will*, I *will* come back!"

Isidore kept one hand on his scapulary. He thought only of saving Charley. Dumbly he asked of the figure of the Virgin in Vaudreuil Church, and of the pictured saints, and of the spiritual things that he imagined behind the points of ruby light before the altar, that help might come over the waters and lift Charley away to warmth and safety.

For himself he was willing, he told those invisible presences, to go on with the wind, if only he might see Charley at the end. Charley took no thought of Isidore. He thought of the sighing breeze, the remoteness of the stars, and the grief of his mother.

When the snow-storm came Isidore said, "I'm going to get up and beat my arms together."

With that, he folded the carpet twice over Charley, and completely covered him from the storm, all so naturally that the little boy never

thought of the self-sacrifice. Then Isidore vigorously flung his arms together to beat the cold out of his body. His undercoat was heavy, and he was warmly clad for ordinary experiences.

After the snow passed, Isidore still battled by exercise against the raw cold, and looked back across the deepening dusk at the lowering light-house outside Toronto Bay.

In spite of his misery and fear the reclaimed outcast was happier than ever he had been in his pariah days. His heart was comforted with a great love, and despair was not yet heavy upon him. Out of such bodily suffering he had often before emerged with life.

"Listen, Mr. Charley! They're after us!" Isidore grasped the child by the foot.

Half across the wind came a tug's scream. When it ceased they shouted—not without a sense of the futility of trying to send their voices to where a red light sometimes shone, and again disappeared.

"Didn't I tell you my father would come?" cried Charley. "Do you think they see us?"

"They will—they're looking for us."

"My! I wish they'd hurry up. It's cold, Isidore. And the boat is all over snow now."

"Well, then, keep the carpet round you, and cover your face up. First I'll shake the snow off the carpet. There now. Try to keep dry, Mr. Charley."

"You're cold, aren't you, Isidore?"

"Oh, I don't mind a little cold like this."

"Why don't they come?"

"I'm afraid they're leaving us. No—here she comes. I can see her green light now."

He shouted with all his strength.

"Do they hear you, Isidore?"

"The wind is against me. I'll wait till they get nearer."

The tug was coming straight down on them, Isidore thought. But she turned and went far to the westward. They shouted themselves hoarse, in vain.

When the *Nixon* turned again she passed across their course as far ahead as she had formerly been behind. Thrice the despairing lads saw her lights turn in the eastern and western distances, and cross their bows again. They could scarcely hear their own calls.

When she turned the fourth time they lost her light in the darkness.

Charley again lay down. Isidore covered him as before, and resumed his exercise. He was conscious, as time passed, of becoming tired and numb, and he struggled rather to beat off the advancing lethargy than for heat. The sensation of being cruelly pierced had, to some extent, lessened with the chilling of his blood. He knew that his one chance of life lay in continuing that mechanical beating of his arms.

Charley, warmly sheltered, often came near the edge of sleep, only to start wide awake at some louder splash, with a freshened sense of the strangeness of the boat's motion, and of the wind's melancholy.

Sometimes, pushing down the carpet, he looked at Isidore's dim figure, and received reassurance from its constant movement.

It is not in the nature of a young boy to comprehend uncomplaining suffering of which he has had no experience. Isidore acted so naturally that Charley's inherent spirit of fair play was not awakened to protest by knowing

that his comrade was being gradually chilled to bone and heart.

"Isidore, are you there?" cried Charley, rousing from a near approach to sleep.

"Yes, Mr. Charley. I'm all right."

"I don't like you to call me Mr. Charley, out here, someway. It makes me lonely. I say, Isidore, would you like me to say my prayers — out loud, you know, like I do to my mother. I've been saying them to myself, but it's not the same."

"Yes, Mr. Charley, I would that."

"Say just 'Charley,' Isidore. I'll come to where you are and kneel down."

"Then you'll be cold, Charley — *mon petit, mon petit, mon chéri, petit ange!*"

"No. It'll only take me a minute, Isidore. I'll soon get warm when I lie down." He scrambled to his comrade. "Hold my two hands. Wasn't it lucky we had our mittens? I'll kiss you, Isidore, if you like. There. Oh, how cold your face is!"

"It's just the wind, Charley. Don't mind me. I'll be all right."

"Well, I'll say them then," and the youngster went on hoarsely with his usual formula:—

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take;"

and then added, "God bless my dear father and mother, and Mary and Hannah and Isidore and me and grandma, and all I love, and everybody in the world. Good-night, mother darling. Oh, I ought to say 'good-night, Isidore,' but I forgot. Now I'll lie down. Thank you for hearing me. Why, Isidore, you're crying!"

"It's only the wind, Charley. Do you always pray that way for me?"

"Of course! Didn't you ever know that?"

"It makes me feel good. I'd like if you'd kiss me again, Charley. Will you?"

They hugged one another hard. Then Isidore again tucked the carpet well around his little captain's legs and sides.

"Good-night, Isidore! Thank you for calling me Charley."

"Good-night, Charley! I'm glad you prayed for me, too."

Their throats were so exhausted that they but faintly heard one another through the cov-

erings which encompassed the younger boy. Fatigued, awake long after his usual bedtime, soothed by the warmth to which he had returned, and mesmerized, in a sort, with steady thinking about his mother, Charley soon slept soundly.

Setting his back to the wind Isidore resumed his exercise, but ever his arms moved more languidly as the numbness crept toward heart and brain.

Slowly he sank into that misery of coldness which is neither wakefulness nor sleep. Isidore dozed in a fashion. Sometimes he forgot to beat his arms together, and began again with an increasing sense that the exercise was painful and of no avail.

His brain, with the incessant strain upon his vital forces, became weaker, partly wild, partly benumbed. But all the time his soul remained clear and high with the thought that through his sacrifice Charley might be saved. It is not to be supposed that he never longed to lie down beside the child and share the narrow coverings. But he knew that would be to deprive his little captain of much warmth.

As the hours passed, the intervals during which he forgot to move his arms became very long. It was not till repeated whistles from the fleet of tugs came through the darkness that his struggle against the comatose state became again fully a conscious one.

He turned to the east and saw the far separated lanterns that forged on and past. The nearest, the most westward light of the irregular line, seemed but a little distance away.

Isidore summoned his remaining life, and strove to call audibly. The vain effort gave him a nightmare feeling of inability. He found he could not move when he was minded to rouse Charley. The lights drew past star after star that he picked out to mark their progress. The whistles screamed at intervals; and still the increasing inertness of Isidore was not broken but only disturbed.

He could still think. He was vaguely aware of horror at the paralysis which bound him from motion; he kept dumbly assuring himself:—

“They are looking for us. Charley will be saved. They are so many that they must find

us—some time before morning they will turn—they will see us when the moon rises. Charley will be warm all night—he will be saved, *mon chéri, mon petit*, who prays for me at night.”

Ever more faintly screaming the tugs went on, and beyond where his diminished senses could follow. As the moon rose from the water it seemed to him a great face blessing him. He felt that his scapulary was still in his hand—then even the sense of enduring for Charley faded away.

In the gray morning Charley awoke wondering at the screaming of steam-whistles. He thought himself in bed at home. How could such a noise be allowed in the house?

Lifting his head he saw the dull sky, the faint moon, and a few paling stars. The boat was not rocking. There was no wind.

“Isidore!” he called.

Isidore’s back was to him, but Isidore did not move. Charley struggled up and crawled to his comrade.

“Isidore, Isidore!” he called, shaking the figure by the shoulder. “Isidore, wake up,

we're saved! I see tugs coming. Don't you hear me, Isidore?"

Charley drew off his mitten, and placed his hand caressingly on his companion's neck.

"How cold you are, Isidore!" he cried, and craned his head over the shoulder of the silent one.

"Why, Isidore, your eyes are open. Isidore, Isidore! Can't you speak? *Isidore, you're not dead!*" cried Charley, and then looked, without speaking again, into that face of the placidity he had never before seen.

So he waited till his father lifted him away, while the crews of the tugs cheered with exultation.

"Father, is Isidore dead?" said the boy.

"Isidore is with God," said Mr. Lancely; and Charley cried as though his heart would break.



THE TEN-DOLLAR BILL.



THE TEN-DOLLAR BILL.

HENRY CLARKE, at eighteen years of age, was in the first year of his apprenticeship to his cousin, George Andrews, a Civil Engineer, who placed the young fellow in charge of a short canal, or rock cutting, intended to drain a small lake situated not far from Portage du Fort, on the Ottawa River.

Harry's duty was to hire, pay, and supply with proper food and blasting materials the gang of twenty to thirty navvies engaged on the work.

Their operations were all directed by a big Scotch foreman, named James Stewart,—a giant in physique,—about as slow with his tongue as men are ever made. He was thoroughly honest, and much respected in the village of Rosadale where he lived, spite of public knowledge that he went on a great spree about

once a year. At that time, and in that part of Canada, occasional drunkenness was regarded as a venial offence, and detracted little from a man's reputation for morality.

The job of blasting out the canal became a very disagreeable one by the end of October, when nearly finished, as the men were compelled to stand most of the time in mud and water. Cold weather added to their discomfort, and all rejoiced, though their wages were very high, when the job was at last completed by tearing away the dam, which let the lake water rush into their excavation. Next morning they would start for Rosadale, a hundred miles away, where all of them lived.

James Stewart, the foreman, was an old resident of that village; so was George Andrews, Harry Clarke's employer and cousin. Harry had lived in the place for a few months only, and was generally regarded there as a good-looking youth, having no moral qualities in particular, but, probably, somewhat light in character, inasmuch as he wore "city clothes" and reprehensibly tight trousers.

There was a good deal of fun in the shanty

on the night after the dam had been torn away. Harry, very careless in his generosity, had been foolish enough to treat the men to a two-gallon jug of whiskey, brought in from Portage du Fort, seven miles distant. There was not enough to give each man more than a couple of drinks, not enough to intoxicate any one — for they all took some — but, unfortunately, enough to give most of the navvies a decided taste for more. All were Irish except James Stewart, and had the drinking habits commonly ascribed to their race.

Next morning when they started before daylight to catch the boat going down the Ottawa River from Portage du Fort, the navvies were all agog with talk of the “real stuff” they meant to buy when they reached the Portage. Harry knew that few, if any, of them had any money, though a considerable sum was due to each man.

“You’ll have to get your whiskey on trust then, boys,” said he. “I’ll pay none of you a cent till you all get home to Rosadale.”

“Arrah now, boss, sure you wouldn’t be that mane,” said one coaxingly.

"Faix an' you'll advance a few dollars to aich av us now, won't you?" pleaded another.

"Troth and it's himself that has the funny look in his 'oi," remarked the humorist of the gang, winking to his mates. "Begorra wid our t'roats burnin' for a dhrop, it's not the likes of him 'ud be disapp'intin' us av a taste of the crathur this blessed mornin'?"

Harry had a little Irish blood himself, and knew well enough how to meet blarney and coaxing.

"It's deluding me you'd be thin, gintlemen," said he, adopting their idioms and blarneying in return. "What would the ladies of so many respectable citizens say if I helped them all to get drunk — and the children, the darlings, waiting for hugs from sober daddies — and me with my pockets full of letters from their mothers asking me not to give a red cent to one of them till they get home? Come now."

"Bad cess to the man that'll say the young boss is in airnest," said the humorist. "Sure I'd bate him blue myself that ud say that."

So it continued till the journey on foot was

more than half over. During the whole time James Stewart, the big foreman, had said nothing. It happened then that a most unlucky thought came into Harry's young head. Tired by the importunities of the half-laughing men he cried, "See here now, you thirsty villains! If James wants you to have a little money at the Portage, I'll pay a trifle all round."

He had not noticed that Stewart had taken liquor the night before, and he fully expected the foreman to be with him in refusing the men any cash. It was a bad misjudgment of Stewart's character. Slow, sure, ponderous, faithful; the kind of man who will carry out orders at all costs, he was yet totally unfit for such responsibility as was now forced on him, and quite unable to resist the importunities that began.

The navvies all dropped behind, and turned their solicitations on old James, while Harry walked swiftly ahead to procure tickets for their trip home. Before the gang had reached Portage du Fort, the quick-witted Irishmen had completely cornered Stewart and coaxed his consent. Harry was sitting in the inn-parlor

near the steamboat landing, when the foreman entered with the men at his heels.

Stewart took off his cap and stood silent, looking shame-facedly at the feet of "the young boss."

"He wants us to get paid a couple of dollars aich," explained the humorist, Pat, with the air of a meritorious interpreter.

"Mind what you promised, Mister Harry, darlin'," said another.

"Do you, James?" asked Harry, in surprise.

"Yes — what's the use?" growled Stewart, sulkily.

"They'll get drunk as sure as a gun," objected Harry.

"Ah now, boss, sure you wouldn't go back on your word!" pleaded Pat. The foreman said nothing for a few moments, then muttered, "I'd like a few dollars myself."

"Oh, well," said Harry, in considerable surprise. "If you will be foolish I suppose I must keep my promise."

Then he gave each man two dollars, debiting him in his note-book at the same time. One by one, when paid, they went out to the bar-room. At last only Stewart remained.

"Do you want any more?" asked Harry, seeing that the foreman fingered his two-dollar bill irresolutely.

"Maybe I might," answered Stewart.

Harry at once handed him a ten-dollar bill, which Stewart put in his right-hand waistcoat pocket instantly, without looking at it. The amount was not mentioned by Harry at all.

As the man clutched the bill, Harry caught a strong smell of whiskey from his breath, and, looking more closely, saw that the big foreman's usually dull eye was glittering, and that his face was much flushed; but he was perfectly steady on his legs and, without saying another word, stalked heavily out of the room with the two-dollar bill in his left hand. Harry at once placed twelve dollars against Stewart's name in his note-book.

Within quarter of an hour the young fellow had reason to regret his folly. His men were howling, laughing, swearing at the top of their voices. Before the boat started, all except the foreman, who retained his taciturnity, seemed half drunk.

They insisted on carrying "the young boss"

down to the steamboat on their shoulders, Stewart gravely superintending the operation. Harry already bitterly repented the yielding which had given him so much popularity, and a drunken gang. Before the boat stopped, some thirty miles down the river, the navvies were uncontrollable. With their quarrelling and fighting the lower deck was a pandemonium. Each man had bought a bottle of liquor before starting. Stewart had now become as voluble as any.

At Sand Point they had to take the railway for Rosadale, and there all managed to get aboard the train. At Arnprior, a few miles further on, most of those who could still walk insisted on getting off to procure more liquor. All were left behind, and Stewart was one of the missing. Harry went on alone to Rosadale. Next morning he had a telegram from Arnprior stating that the foreman and half of his companions were in the lockup.

Big James had knocked a bar-room counter to pieces, and had smashed the stove with one blow of his huge fist. He had been taken into custody with the others. All had been brought

up before a magistrate next morning and fined. They wanted money to pay their penalty.

Harry's cousin wired to a lawyer to settle the whole business, and that night the men got home to Rosadale. Their wives, Harry's employer, and every one else interested, had been pointing out to the young fellow all day, how inexcusably he had acted in advancing money to the gang. It seemed to be considered quite a matter of course that laboring men should get drunk, if they could, when away from home; hence there was a curiously perverted public sympathy for the fined men, and all the responsibility for their blackguardism and money losses was thrown on Harry.

Next day all except Stewart went to George Andrews' office for their wages. There sat Harry with his accounts and money. Each man acknowledged the two dollars given him at the Portage, but seemed inclined to hold Harry very guilty in the matter.

"Sure now, boss," said Pat, who had a broken head and one eye badly swelled. "Sure now, it wasn't the dacent thing to be puttin' temptations forninst us that a-way. And us wid

a taste the night before—an' three months widout a dhrop till thin—och, it wasn't the clane thing to be givin' us money at all, at all."

"Get out of this, you impudent old rascal!" cried Harry to this moralist, and Pat departed hastily, stopping just long enough in the doorway to cast a look of intensely tickled slyness out of his one undamaged eye at "the young boss."

James Stewart stayed at home, ashamed to show himself for three days. Then just at dusk of evening he came for his pay.

"Seventy-two dollars," said Harry, looking at his book.

"Eighty-two, sir," said James.

"No, you're wrong, Stewart. Look here, seventy-two you see."

"What's the twelve dollars for?" asked the foreman, looking at the account.

"That's what I gave you at the Portage."

The big man looked with angry surprise into the young fellow's eyes.

"You only gave me two dollars at the Portage," he said.

"Why, James! Twelve."

"Two."

"Pshaw. Don't you remember me giving you a ten, after the two? Don't you remember me asking you if you wanted any more, and then handing you a ten?"

"No, I don't. It's not true."

There was no doubt the man thought he was right. Harry saw that clearly, and tried hard to recall the ten to his recollection, but quite in vain. Stewart was one of those dogged-dull men who, when they feel right, simply will not or cannot admit a contrary possibility.

"I'd a paid my fine," said he, "if I'd a' had ten dollars on me."

"But you had spent the ten dollars before that."

"No, I didn't have no money after I left the Portage; I bought whiskey with the whole two dollars there." It was hopeless to argue with him. He would not touch the seventy-two dollars, and evidently believed Harry was trying to cheat him.

"Maybe you'll think again before morning," he said, as he went slowly out.

Next day Stewart came into the office early, and appealed to George Andrews, Harry's employer and cousin. "He hadn't said a word about it to nobody," he declared, and evidently wished to let Harry off without public exposure. The lad went over the whole thing again, but Stewart remained unshaken. His evident sincerity had great weight with Harry's cousin, who respected Stewart very highly, and understood how much the man was respected in the village.

"Are you sure you haven't made a mistake," he asked Harry.

"Quite certain. I distinctly remember the whole thing—the ten-dollar bill was of the Bank of Montreal—he put it into his vest pocket."

"Of course, if you gave him the ten it was of the Bank of Montreal," said Mr. Andrews, dryly; "the bills I sent you were all of that Bank."

"Do you mean to say you imagine I have tried to cheat Stewart," asked Harry, angrily.

"No — no — oh, no — of course not; but James is so well known in Rosadale — his word

goes a long way here. I wouldn't like him to tell his story about the place."

"He was half drunk when he got the money," said Harry, hotly.

"It's not true," put in Stewart, nettled to be reminded so nakedly before Mr. Andrews of his spree. "I had a couple of glasses, maybe, no more. What's that amount to of a cold mornin'? I mind the two-dollar bill well enough; if you'd 'a give me a ten, wouldn't I mind it, too?"

"Now look here, James," said Harry, "I know you think you're telling the truth; but you're not. I gave you that ten-dollar bill, and you spent it in whiskey. Or, if you didn't, you lost it. I say, that's the very waistcoat you had on that day. Maybe you had matches in the pocket, and pulled out the bill with some of them without noticing."

Stewart had instinctively put his hand up to his right vest pocket, and was fumbling in it.

"No," said he, "I don't carry matches in that pocket. You're too cunning, my lad. Keep the money," he cried, with a sudden access of anger. "You're young, though, to be robbing the poor. Keep it till the judge says

who's right. We'll have law-play on this yet," and he stalked out of the office.

"This is a bad business, Harry," said Mr. Andrews. "Everybody will believe him. You're not known here."

"I can't help that," answered the young fellow. "I will not be browbeaten out of the truth. I paid him the ten dollars like a fool, but I will not let it be said that I only charged it to him like a rogue."

"You're right enough," said Andrews, "if you're sure. But his word does go such a long way in this village, and you are a stranger."

This tone, in which his cousin continued to treat the affair, made Harry very angry and miserable, but he remained silent, and awaited events. Next day a writ was served on Mr. Andrews at Stewart's instance, for he had brought suit in the Division Court to recover eighty-two dollars and costs. Andrews, of course, stood by his young relative, paid seventy-two dollars to the Clerk of the Court, and there the matter rested for about a month—a most miserable month for Harry Clarke!

The story was the favorite talk of Rosadale.

Stewart's life-long reputation for truth and honesty carried opinion entirely with him. Harry lay under that curious suspicion which attaches, in many country hamlets, to all young strangers who dress well and carry their heads up proudly. Many people would not speak to him. Several well-intentioned persons came with advice to give up the ten dollars — "such a small sum," they said, as though quite convinced that he was a cheat. All the navvies sided with their foreman, telling how they had each received two dollars, and how Stewart had come straight from Harry to them in the bar-room, with a two-dollar bill between his fingers, which he had at once spent in a "treat all round" and a bottle for himself.

Harry went up to the Portage and to Arnprior, seeking evidence that the foreman had somewhere been seen with a ten-dollar bill. The search was vain, and the effort was put down to his credit as an outrageous piece of hypocritical impudence. Public opinion affected his cousin and his cousin's family so strongly that poor Harry often found them looking strangely at him. One day George Andrews

told his young relative of another Civil Engineer who would take him and his articles if he did not wish to stay in Rosadale. Harry was mortified almost to tears, and answered angrily:—

“You suspect me, George,—I know it. I’ve known you believed Stewart’s story all along. Well, you can break my articles if you please, I think you’d better, or I will. But right here in this village I’m going to stay till everybody knows me better than to believe that I would lie or cheat.”

He often observed that workmen cast scornful glances at him. The thought that people said he had “tried to cheat a poor man” galled him dreadfully. Once a laborer’s wife came to tell him that “there was talk” of ducking him in the river!

“They may drown me, Mrs. Lynch,” said Harry, stoutly; “but they can’t make me run away, and they can’t make me guilty.”

“Sure, thin, it’s hard not to believe poor James,” said the woman.

“That’s so,” said Harry. “He thinks he is telling the truth; but he got the money.”

Harry Clarke was a haggard, weak, miserable-

looking boy when the case came on in Court, having had no good sleep for weeks. He was excessively fretted by the impossibility of convincing people that his word was entitled to more weight than the foreman's.

The court-room was densely crowded. Stewart was the first witness; he told his story in his slow, impressive way, the judge letting him bring in anything germane to the matter.

In these Canadian Courts the procedure is very lax, and the object of the judge usually is to get at the probabilities in any way. So big James told how the men had received two dollars each, how he was last, how he got two dollars just like the others, how he had gone into the bar-room with the bill in his hand, how he had "borried" at Arnprior, and all the rest of it.

The judge was evidently much impressed by the straightforward story. He looked at Harry very severely now and again. It was hard for the lad to endure all the contemptuous eyes that were directed to him. He was himself greatly affected by the strength of Stewart's story, and sometimes almost doubted whether

he had not dreamed that he had paid over the ten-dollar bill.

Then he thought of his note-book. With that evidence the lawyer had said that Stewart would certainly be beaten in the case, but what did Harry care about winning the case unless he could clear his character? What was the use of saving ten dollars if he were not believed?

His heart was very low; though he did not falter in his determination to stay in Rosadale, he did believe that years would go over before he could live down the reputation of a cheat. The lad was not religious, but in his agony he closed his eyes and sent up a silent prayer for help.

"Do you wish to ask any questions, young man," said the judge, sternly. Harry opened his eyes.

"I?" he asked.

"Yes, you."

Harry stood up trembling. Then suddenly he recovered his faculties. "James," he asked entreatingly, "don't you remember that ten-dollar bill?"

"No, I don't, nor you neither. You never gave it to me."

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"I say," he cried, "is the lining of that pocket all right?"



"Yes, I did, James. You put it into the right-hand pocket of that very waistcoat."

James instinctively raised his hand. His thumb and forefinger were deep in the pocket.

A sudden inspiration came to Harry.

"I say," he cried, "is the lining of that pocket all right?"

Stewart looked at him with a very frightened face, and turned deadly pale. Then he drew forth a crumpled piece of paper and slowly unfolded it, with his big hands and fingers all trembling. The man looked unutterably shocked.

"What is it?" cried Harry.

"Oh, my God, Mister Harry, I humbly beg your pardon," groaned big James.

"What is it?" asked the judge.

"Your honor, it's the ten-dollar bill. It was down through the lining."

What a cheering went up! Everybody was trying to shake hands with Harry at once; but he went straight over to Stewart.

"Silence — silence in Court — silence" — roared the clerk.

"James," said Harry, "I never thought you

were telling a lie. It was all a mistake. Now it's all right."

"I'll never forgive myself," said Stewart, and drawing his cap over his eyes, walked straight out of the court-room.

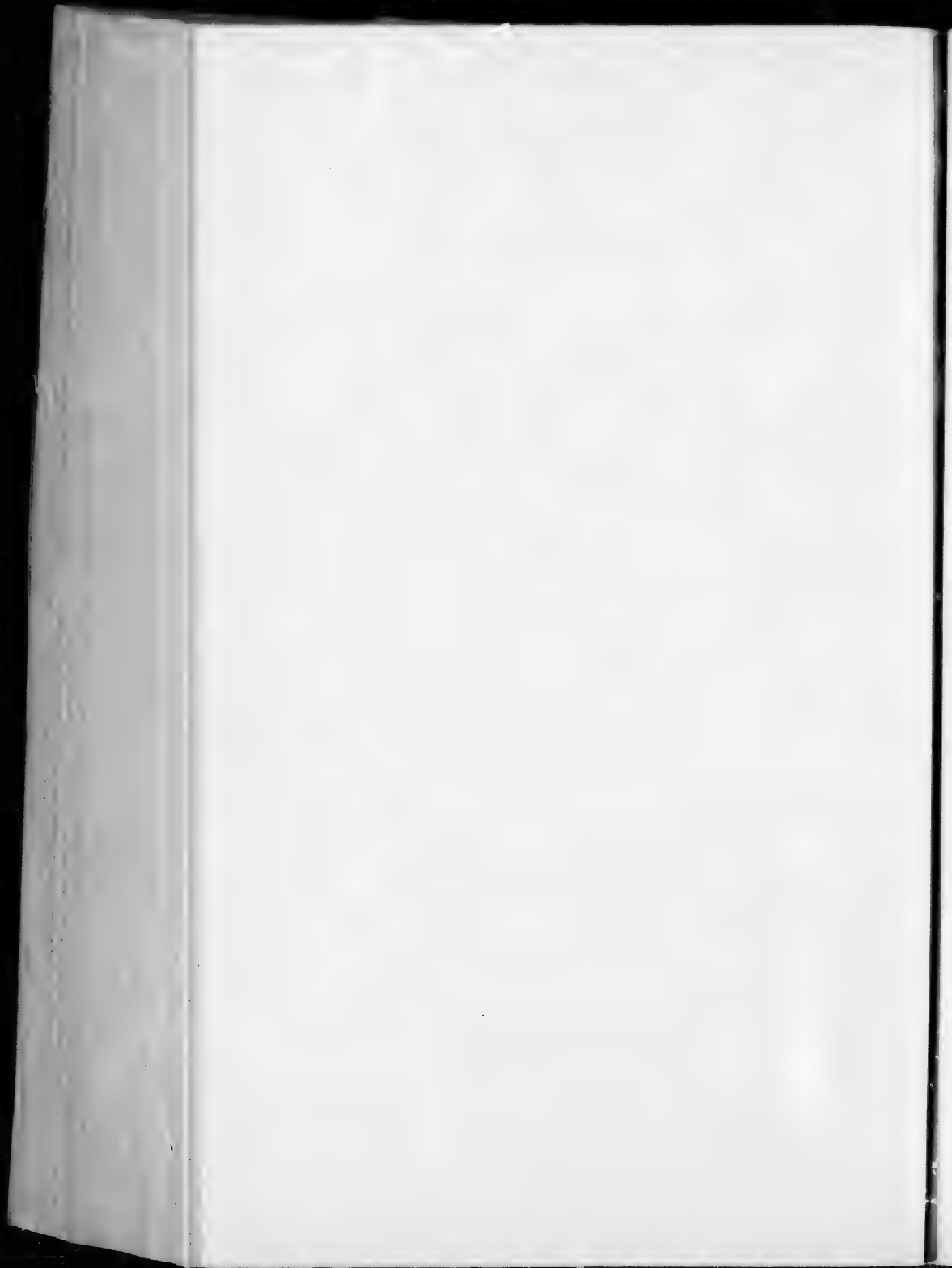
He did forgive himself, however, but he never drank any more liquor. Now he is a very old man, and often tells this story slowly to his grandchildren by way of illustrating the folly of drinking, and of being too sure.

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KING TOM.



KING TOM.

WILLIE BLACKADDER, sole and proud occupant of a high dog-cart, was walking a big sorrel horse to and fro before the door of his father's law-office, when the lawyer came out on the sidewalk.

"Willie," said he, as the boy drove King Tom up, "I find I can't go to St. Kitt's to-day. There's a client inside I must stay with. Do you suppose you could go alone?"

"Why, yes, father!" Willie was joyful at the prospect of driving King Tom sixteen miles and back.

"You're sure you remember the turn below Drummondville?"

"Oh, yes, father!"

"Well, I'll trust you with Tom. Don't drive him hard this warm day. It's only eleven o'clock now — you'll have lots of time."



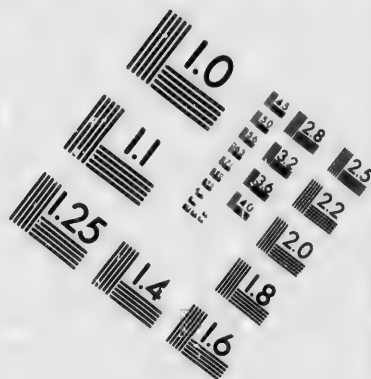
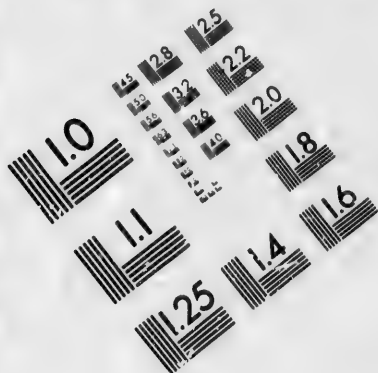
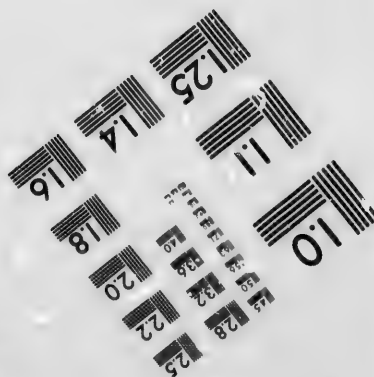
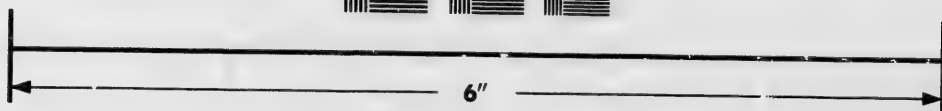
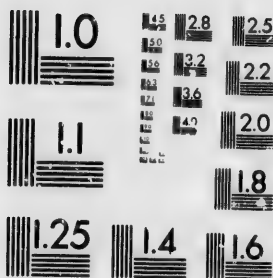


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"What am I to do, father?"

"Take this letter to the bank and give it to the cashier. It contains a lot of money that must be deposited to-day. So take care you don't lose it."

"Oh, I'll be careful, father."

"Well, don't forget—careful of Tom, too. It's not every boy of fourteen that I'd trust with a three-hundred-dollar horse. Give him water at Thorold, going and coming. Not at the canal—at the tavern on the hill; there's only one safe watering-place on the canal there, and you might miss it. Put him up at the Stephenson House in St. Kitt's, and get your dinner there. Here's some change for you."

"All right, father. Thank you. I'll drive home and tell mother I'm going."

"Never mind; I'll tell mother all about it. Oh, I had quite forgotten her dress and Bella's. After leaving the bank, go to Mrs. Hendrick's store and get the two silk dresses they were to have ready to-day. You'll catch it if you lose those dresses, Willie."

"Oh, I guess there's not much danger of me losing *them*," said Willie, laughing.

"Well, away you go! Good-bye! I expect you back by six or seven."

In all America there was perhaps no happier boy than Willie, as he drove King Tom along the hard road to Drummondville, with the mist of Niagara Falls towering before him and to his right. The June day was clear and odorous. He was going to St. Kitt's, which seemed to him a large city. King Tom was so big and handsome as to catch admiration anywhere, and Willie loved the kind, brave horse with a perfect and familiar affection.

Above all, his father had trusted him alone. Careful? No word could express how careful Willie meant to be.

Indeed, his resolve to be careful was so poignant that he drew rein before the Drummondville stables, three miles from his father's office, and inquired the way to Thorold, though he had been twice over the whole road to St. Kitt's in daylight.

The man of whom Willie asked the way was standing on the sidewalk, with a straw in his mouth and his thin bow-legs so far apart that a small and solemn brindled bull-dog stood

between them as if to caricature them by the more astonishing crookedness of his own. Otherwise dog and man had many points alike. Both were wide and compact of body, weather-beaten, and long of the under jaw. They seemed equally indifferent to Willie and interested in King Tom.

The man put both hands to Tom's mouth, pressed his lips apart, and looked at his teeth. Then, as if he had found an answer there, he looked at Willie with shrewd, merry, blue eyes, and said: —

"I'm just starting for St. Kitt's, young man. Peter," he shouted, "fetch round the mare!"

Before he spoke Willie had guessed rightly that this was no less notable a personage than Ott Eddis, the horse-trainer, vastly admired just then by the horsemen of Welland County because his trotting mare, Maggie Meacham, had done wonders at the Buffalo spring meeting.

"You're Lawyer Blackadder's son, I know," said Ott. "Fine man, your father. I'd bet you'll be a tiptop lawyer, too, before *I* want any law-play."

Willie flushed with delight to hear his father praised and himself treated as a man—almost. He reached the pinnacle of pride when Ott stepped back, took the straw from his mouth as if it might impede his judgment, walked around King Tom in profound meditation on his legs, and ended by remarking:—

“There ain’t a finer make of a family horse in all Canada! And sense! Just you give *him* the word you’re going to Thorold!”

“I’m going all the way to St. Kitt’s alone,” said Willie, proudly.

Ott threw back his head and gazed at the delighted boy with an air of intense surprise. He seemed to find no sufficient words, but appreciatively touched his cap to Willie as “the mare” came from the yard with the fast, engine-like walk of a trained trotter. She was bright bay with one white stocking, and so Willie knew that his enraptured eyes at last rested on Maggie Meacham.

“Roger,” said Ott, facetiously, to his bulldog, “you’ll stop home to-day and keep Pete respectable.”

Then he took Maggie’s reins from Pete,

the grinning stableman, swung himself lightly into his sulky, and was off in a moment, with King Tom close behind.

Willie drove behind Ott with an exhilarating sense that everybody seeing the trainer driving Maggie Meacham and frequently turning to look at King Tom's action would take Tom for a great trotter, and his driver for an eminent sportsman.

The fly in this ointment was a doubt whether his father would approve of his being in company with the horse-trainer; but the boy could not see how he might forsake this fascinating society without offending Ott's susceptibilities, for Willie, having a high notion of the social importance of his father's son, believed Ott shared it.

When they reached Thorold, which lay on both sides of the old Welland canal, Ott drove to the water's edge, jumped from his sulky, and loosening Maggie's check-rein, said, "Whoa, Maggie!" and turned to King Tom.

"But my father told me to water Tom at the tavern," said Willie.

"Right enough," said Ott. "But he didn't

expect I'd be with you to show you the place. This is the only spot where it's safe to put a horse in. You don't need to go up the hill to Pud Gorman's tavern this time."

Ott loosened King Tom's check-rein, swung himself into his sulky, drove Maggie into the shallow and let her drink. Willie, following, found his wheels on gravel, and Tom drank between those of Ott's sulky, so little was the water roiled. When Tom lifted his head, Ott drove through the water for a few yards parallel with the bank, and left the canal by a gravelly slope. Then he got out again and replaced the check-reins.

"You'll know that place again, I guess!" he called back as he started.

"Oh, yes. Thank you!" cried Willie; but he had not taken any particular notice of the ground, and he was quite unaware that his "bump of locality" needed reënforcement by careful observation.

Still ecstatic with the weather, the drive, the general admiration for King Tom, and his sportsmanlike company, Willie reached St. Kitt's and duly obeyed all his father's directions. He

had arranged to meet Ott in front of the Stephenson House at three; but when the hostler brought King Tom around from the stables the trainer had not appeared. Nobody about the hotel knew anything more of Ott than that he had passed the place with Maggie Meacham half an hour earlier.

Willie sat in the dog-cart with the package of silk dresses, for five minutes. Then, his soul being satiated with the obvious envy of the St. Kitt's boys, it seemed advisable to start.

Ott must have forgotten the appointment. Willie's father expected him back by six or so. He must bring Tom home dry, and the afternoon was very warm. Moreover, his father would be just as well pleased if he did not travel unnecessarily in Ott's company.

Willie chirruped to Tom, and rolled away for Thorold in high pleasure. His sense of independence was the greater for being alone. After this he would be trusted to take Tom anywhere. His manhood had begun.

Over the canal at Thorold there were several bridges, and Willie could not remember which he had crossed behind Ott. Tom had crossed

all frequently, for they all led from the low road on one bank to the low road on the other. Willie let Tom choose, and the horse did not prefer the bridge of the journey to St. Kitt's.

Willie, crossing the bridge, saw Pud Gorman's inn high up on that steep which could be avoided by watering Tom at the canal. All that the boy clearly remembered of the watering-place was that it was about midway between two bridges, and sided by gravelly slopes.

A plain track, made by water-carts, led him about thirty feet from the road to such a place. He got out, loosened Tom's check-rein, climbed back, and drove forward. The great horse stepped into the water with pleased stretchings of his cramped neck, little snorts of delight, and dainty mincing motions as if he protested, "I don't quite like to wet my nice new shoes." In this customary waterside joke of Tom's Willie always exulted, and now was so intent on it that he gave no attention to a shout from the hill.

The man who uttered it sprang from his chair on the tavern "stoop," and ran, still shouting, toward the canal.

Before he had reached the foot of the hill, men were running toward him from all directions. For Willie had driven forward at a place where the village water-carts barely backed in.

As Tom's beautiful nose touched the water he swung up his head as if indicating, "I'm not quite deep enough," and stepped forward. Instantly his forefeet slid from under him down the steep cutting, and he floundered, with a loud snort of surprise, into and under the water. The heavy dog-cart, tipping and flinging Willie out, pushed King Tom on.

Up the horse came, pawing with his forefeet, striving almost coolly, for he was a brave creature. His hind feet seemed on the bottom, for the canal was there only about six feet deep. Then he thrust out his nose and swam, for still the dog-cart was descending. Knowing now the treacherous bank behind him King Tom struck out for the opposite shore.

Willie, much surprised, but not enough scared to cry out, found himself drawn along by the reins. He forsook them at the thought that he was embarrassing Tom, and then easily

swam ashore. The package of silk dresses floated out as if sucked along by the current of the filled and hidden vehicle.

Two men pulled the boy out on the tow path and he turned to watch Tom, having as yet no doubt that the horse would swim ashore. But Tom had already reached the middle of the canal. There the heavy dog-cart hung down so straight that he could swim no more.

With plunges he tried to spring forward. His front hoofs beat the water incessantly, now above it and then barely on the surface. Sometimes he flung his shoulders high, as if his hind feet had rested a moment on the dog-cart's front.

Willie, seeing Tom becoming desperate, began to scream with grief, and tried to plunge in to the rescue. The men held him.

"You can't do anything," they said. "His hoofs would kill you. Lord—how he paws, poor beast! And his yells—oh, it's awful!"

"Get me a rope!" shouted Willie.

"There's two men run down to the locks for one. But they can't get here in time. He'll beat the life out of himself first. Keep still, boy!"

For Willie was still struggling to break away. Tom's shrieks agonized him to madness. For now the noble horse was wild in terror to be so entangled. His screams had that unsurpassed wretchedness which belongs to the voices of dumb creatures inexpressibly in fear of death.

Willie, exhausted by his own strife to break away, suddenly sank limp — not senseless, but breathless. The men laid him on the ground just as the crowd parted, and a big fellow with a pike-pole came through.

"If some one could get hold of his bridle!" said this man. "I can't swim."

But of all the men present not one cared enough for a horse's life to make the venture. To approach Tom looked indeed like a very dangerous enterprise. He was half-turning as he sprang, now here, now there, and seemed to beat the water over a large area. It was a desperate risk to swim and reach for his head with a pole little more than twelve feet long.

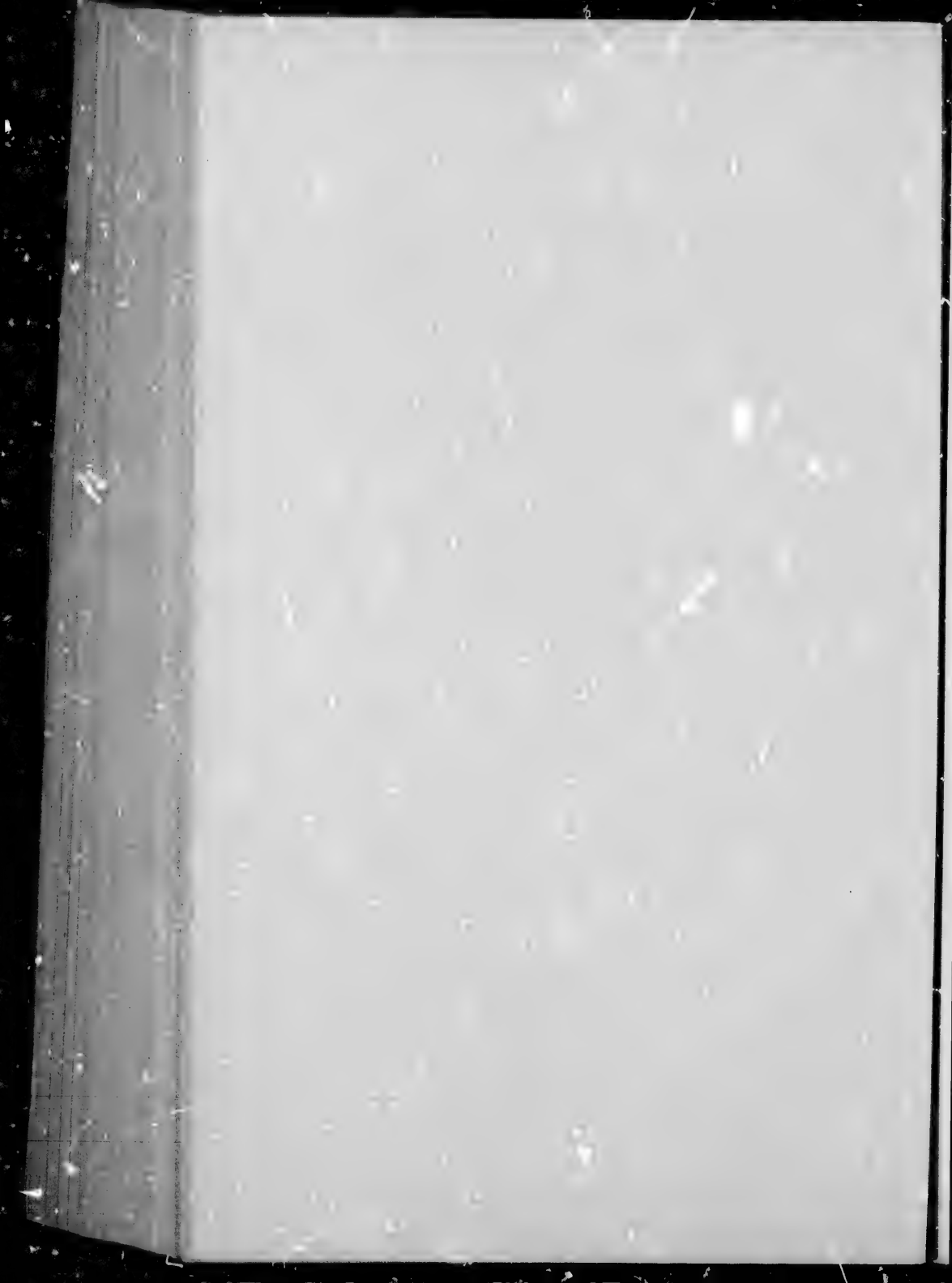
"Give me the pole!" cried Willie, springing up. Perhaps the men thought that the boy who had put the horse in might well try to get him out. Willie grasped the pole and plunged in.

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Willie grasped the pole and plunged in.



Even in that strait the horse seemed to recognize Willie; or perhaps exhaustion had begun its calming effect. King Tom's hoofs ceased from that furious striking, his plunges were quieted; he barely kept his head above water. Panting as if with hope he awaited the boy he loved. Willie never forgot how Tom looked at him then.

The boy, cool now, thrust forward the pole and caught its hook in the head-stall above the bit. A cheer broke out behind him, and about a dozen men plunged in to help. One seized Willie's left hand—he held the pole in his right. Another took that man's free hand, and so they made a living chain to the fifty-foot-distant shore.

Then they pulled. It was, indeed, absurd to suppose that the strength of a boy of fourteen could drag a horse and dog-cart; but crowds are often senseless. They pulled—it was Willie's poor consolation that they did not break his hold of the pole. The horse plunged up and drew the boy toward him. At that the nearest man forsook Willie's hand. Instantly all the men scrambled frantically ashore.

Willie, left alone with the pike-pole, which had come loose from the bridle, faced Tom. Now the horse was shrieking and pawing again. The men shouted, "Come back, boy—back—you'll be killed!"

At that King Tom, as if he had placed his hind feet on the dashboard, flung himself so high that he fell backward. For a few moments his head was under, and his four feet struggling in the air. Then he came to his side, and desperately righted.

Willie swam round him madly, trying to fasten the hook in the bridle again. Then he felt a firm hand on his shoulder, and turning in the hope of seeing a helpful man, beheld the face of Ott Eddis. Ott was almost crying—he loved horses well.

"No use, boy," said Ott, "Tom's past helping. You done your best like a mar. But he's gone. He'd die anyhow if we dragged him out. See—his strength is gone. He's under."

Ott had a rope in his right hand. As they drew him and Willie ashore the trainer said:—

"I'd give a thousand dollars rather than you'd been here without me. But I was de-

layed. If I'd got here ten minutes ago I could have choked him and saved him with my driving reins. You infernal cowardly fools! Why didn't you help the boy?" he raved at the crowd as he stepped ashore. Then he said reflectively, "But men that don't know horses *is* fools."

Willie scarcely heard the trainer. He heard nothing but a little splashing. When he looked back for Tom, he saw nothing but a package of silk dresses floating low on the canal.

"King Tom's out of pain, boy," said the horse-trainer, pitifully.

Ott led the desperate boy to Gorman's tavern, borrowed dry clothes for him, left his own sulky there, put Maggie Meacham to a light buggy, and drove Willie and the silk dresses to his father's house.

The boy saw nothing of the famous "action" of Maggie on that long drive. He wept all the way, and often screamed his remorse and his love for King Tom. Ott, not finding Mr. Blackadder at the house, left Willie and drove to the lawyer's office.

Willie did not know the dresses had been recovered till his sister burst out crying on see-

ing their condition. At that spectacle of wet silk his mother ordered Willie to his own room.

"I don't know what your father will do, Willie," she said, locking him in without giving him one word of sympathy. She was a good-hearted woman, nevertheless; but how could any woman love a horse as Willie loved Tom, and how could any woman guess his woe! To his mother Willie seemed simply a boy who had carelessly destroyed a valuable horse and two silk dresses. To Willie the acutest tragedy was that, with Tom dead by his disobedience, his mother and sister could think of silk dresses!

Willie lay on his bed, face down — his fount of tears run dry. He dreaded his father's foot-step. He knew his father had loved King Tom.

"But not as I did — not as I did — O Tom, Tom, Tom, dear old Tom!" thought the boy; and his woe found no voice but in dry sobs: "Tom — Tom — O dear Tom."

The rod was sacred to Mr. Blackadder as a Scriptural implement of discipline, — but Willie had no dread of the whipping he expected.

"I hope he *will* lick me — I *ought* to get it — I *hope* he will," thought the boy, for his was a nature that demanded penance,

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The lawyer's heavy tread came up-stairs, along the hall, to Willie's door. Willie sat up on the bedside in horror, but not in physical fear. His father loved Tom — his father could never forgive him — he would see that in his father's face!

Mr. Blackadder came in. He took the boy's hand and put his arm round his neck. At the affectionate gesture Willie flung himself, in a storm of weeping, on his father's neck.

"There — there — never mind, Willie. I know how you feel about Tom," said the father, tenderly, holding the boy. "Wasn't he a dear, good horse? You and I will never forget him, Willie. There — there — don't cry so — Ott Eddis told me how bravely you tried to save him. It's all right — your father is sorrier for his boy than for poor Tom. And, Willie, do you know I think we shall have Tom again. I never could quite believe there is no place for good horses in heaven!"

At that strange word Willie lifted up his face and looked into his father's loving eyes. And the goodness of his father went nigh to breaking his heart.

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